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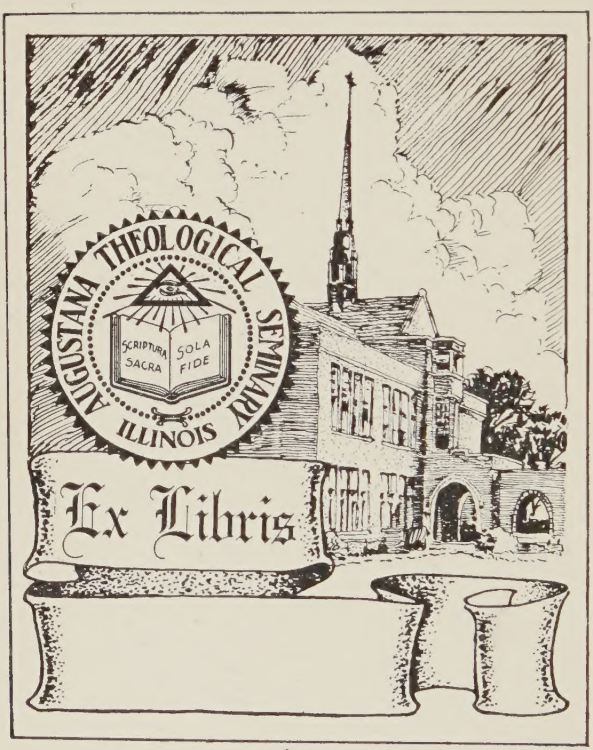
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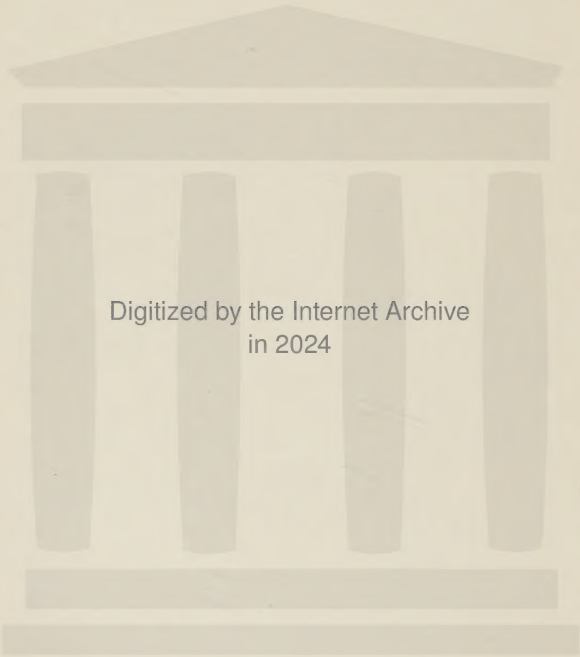

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THE ETHICAL TEACHING OF JESUS

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THE ETHICAL TEACHING OF JESUS

BY

ERNEST F. SCOTT, D.D.

PROFESSOR OF NEW TESTAMENT CRITICISM

UNION THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, NEW YORK

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PREFACE

To-day, as never before, Jesus stands out as the moral leader of humanity. The principles which he laid down have been vindicated through the bitter experiences of the last few years, and men of all opinions are now agreed that the society of the future can be securely built on no other foundation. In some respects, however, this practical interest in the Gospel teaching has made the understanding of it more difficult. Historical perspective is too often forgotten in the anxiety to state the ideas of Jesus in modern terms. All the parties in our present-day controversies are eager to claim him as their champion, and are bent on explaining his attitude in the light of their own theories. I have tried in this book to approach the subject with an open mind, and with the one aim of discovering, on the ground of critical and historical study, what Jesus actually taught.

The book is concerned with the ethical teaching, and I do not profess to deal with the manifold problems which belong more definitely to the religion of Jesus. It is not possible, however, to treat the ethic wholly by itself, and one of my main objects has been to show that it cannot be separated from the religion. There have always been those, and in our time they are more numerous than ever, who have sought to detach the Christian morality from the Christian gospel; but a division of this kind cannot be made. The more we examine the moral teaching of Jesus the more we become aware that it was only the other side of his religious message, and must stand or fall along with it.

My thanks are due to many previous workers, and in a special degree to my colleague, Professor J. E. Frame, of whose profound learning and solid judgment I have continually availed myself.

E. F. Scott.

Union Theological Seminary,
New York.

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INTRODUCTION

The unchanging element in our religion has been its ethical teaching. Its doctrines have been differently understood in each generation; its institutions and ritual have assumed many forms and have given rise to countless divisions. But the ethical demands have never varied. They were set forth two thousand years ago, and in the interval the whole framework of man's life has been remodeled; but they are still valid, in practically their whole extent, for all sections of the church.

It is this permanence of the moral teaching which has ensured the identity of the religion amidst all changes. Modern writers have sometimes argued that Christianity is only a name, under which a number of different religions have found cover. The original gospel gave place, within fifty years, to a type of religion which was more Greek or Oriental than Jewish; this in turn was superseded by the ritualism of the medieval church, and this by the varying phases of Protestantism. Doubtless there has often been a real danger that the religion should lose its continuity, but it has remained the same in virtue of its ethical standards. Not only have these been constant, but they have served as the touchstone whereby the church has been able from time to time to reject whatever was radically alien to Christianity. Ever since the days of Gnosticism strange doctrines have sprung up, and, after a brief prosperity, have disappeared. They fell away, not because they were logically disproved, but because they issued in a mode of life which was manifestly non-Christian.

The ethical teaching has not only preserved the identity of our religion, but has linked it, under all its changing forms, with its Founder. There have been times when the name of Christ seemed to be little more than a survival,—a reminder that the Christian movement had a definite historical beginning. Even in the theology of Paul the life and personality of Jesus would often appear to count for little, and for many centuries afterwards they fell completely into the background. The name of Jesus was connected with a system of doctrines and ceremonies which he himself would not have understood, and many of which he would, perhaps, have condemned. None the less the religion has never ceased to be the religion of Jesus, inasmuch as it rests on those moral principles which he laid down. He might not have understood the theology of Paul or Augustine or Luther, or, we might add, of Tolstoi or General Booth; but he would have understood the *men*. He would have recognized that in their moral temper and aspirations they were seeking to follow him. A religion must always be judged in the last resort by the type of character which it produces. Beliefs and forms of worship are only the means by which men try to attain to the kind of life which they deem highest; and the Christian ideal of character has always been that which was exemplified in Jesus. For this reason, if for no other, the religion which calls itself by his name must be reckoned his creation, bound up inseparably with his recorded life.

The ethical teaching of Jesus has thus been the constant element in Christianity, but its relation to the gospel as a whole has been conceived in different ways. (1) The Greek theologians, and this is true also in some measure of Paul and the fourth evangelist, made it of secondary value. A mystical change of being was for them the great end which Christianity

set itself to achieve. Human nature was weak and corruptible, and could have no part in the higher life until it was somehow wrought into affinity with the divine nature. Jesus had come into the world to effect this transformation. He was a divine being in human form, and by union with him men underwent a new birth and became spiritual instead of earthly. According to one view moral obedience was the necessary condition for this mystical change. It was the discipline whereby the soul was liberated from the affections which bound it to earth,—so that the transforming power could work in it without hindrance. Another view, which appears to be that of Paul, makes the moral renewal a *consequence* of the mystical change. The man who has entered into union with the divine nature becomes by that act righteous and holy. Partaking of the essence of God he partakes also of His moral attributes, and cannot sin. (2) During the greater part of Christian history the religious and the ethical were allowed to stand side by side,—equally important but in no way vitally connected. Broadly speaking this has always been the position of the Catholic Church, and in most Protestant communions the same view has more or less consciously prevailed. To be a Christian it is necessary to hold certain beliefs, to observe a number of stated ceremonies, to undergo a spiritual experience. It is also necessary to be a good man, conforming your life as far as may be to the precepts of Jesus. Opinions have differed as to the relative value of these two sides of Christian duty. The inconsistencies of faith and conduct have often been deplored, and have offered a fruitful theme to the satirist. But for the most part it is taken for granted that the Christian life is made up of two separate elements, which the true disciple must learn to join together. (3) In our own time the ethical demand has come to occupy the central place.

The older types of Christian teaching are condemned on the ground that they laid all stress on creed and ritual, and left the moral requirements out of account. It is sometimes affirmed, in so many words, that the devotional practices of which our fathers made so much are wholly superfluous. They may have had their use in a past age, but were never more than a formal discipline, and may now be abandoned. Our religion, as we can now clearly perceive, is an ethic pure and simple. Jesus expressed himself in the language current in his time, and made the usual appeal to divine sanctions; but what he had in mind was nothing else than obedience to the moral law.

The conception of Jesus himself, as will appear in the following chapters, was different from any of these later ones which have prevailed in the church. His ethic and his religion are everywhere so intimately bound together that they cannot be separated. The demand is often made in these days for some clear presentation of the ethical principles of the gospel, apart from those religious ideas which complicate and obscure them. However else they conceive of Jesus men have grown willing to accept him as the supreme moral teacher. They recognize that almost every advance towards a larger justice and brotherhood has been due, in the past centuries, to his influence, and in the new perplexities which have beset the world they are looking to him, more than to any other, for safe direction. There has never been a time when his ethical teaching has counted for so much, and the desire to take it by itself and embody it in a new social order is not unnatural. But we need always to remember that a separation of this kind is, in the last resort, impossible. Jesus was something else than a lawgiver or reformer. He came with a message from God, and his ethic has no meaning apart from his religion.

THE ETHICAL TEACHING OF JESUS

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CHAPTER I

THE RECORDS OF THE TEACHING

FOR our knowledge of Jesus' teaching we are dependent, almost solely, on the New Testament. It is true that a number of sayings have come to us from other sources, but their authenticity is never free from doubt. Some of them are so much in harmony with the Gospel sayings that they may well go back to a genuine tradition. "Be wise money-changers." [1] "Pray for the great and the little will be yours; pray for the earthly, and the heavenly will come to you." [2] "In what state I find you, therein I judge you." [3] "The weak will be saved by the strong." [4] "Those who are with me have understood me not." [5] "Never be glad except when you look upon your brother in love." [6] In sayings like these we seem to catch at least an echo of the voice which spoke the Parables and the Sermon on the Mount. Sometimes the characteristic note is lacking; as in the difficult saying, "If

[1] Clem. Alex. *Strom.* I: 28.
[2] Clem. Alex *Strom.* I: 24.
[3] Justin Martyr. *Dial.* xlvii.
[4] Apostolic Church-order, 26.
[5] Acts of Peter, 10.
[6] Gosp. of the Hebrews, quoted by Jerome.

ye make not the right as the left and the left as the right, and that which is above as that which is beneath, and that which is behind as that which is before, ye shall not know the Kingdom." [7] For one saying, discovered on an archway in Northern India, we are indebted to a non-Christian source: "Jesus, on whom be peace, hath said, This world is like to a bridge; pass over it, but make not your dwelling thereon." The thought is here a beautiful one, but is more probably to be ascribed to some forgotten Eastern sage than to Jesus. The most interesting of all the "unwritten sayings" are those which were discovered near the end of last century among the papyri of Oxyrhynchus. They consist of about a dozen sentences, some of them now reduced to a few fragmentary words, and are each introduced by the formula "Jesus said." Several of them are repeated, with slight modifications, from our Gospels, and it may be that one or two others go back to an authentic source. The date of the fragments may be 200 A. D. or even earlier, when genuine reminiscences of the Lord's teaching were still current in the church. But the collection as a whole seems to proceed from some community in Egypt which interpreted the gospel message in a mystical sense. From this point of view we have probably to explain the most striking of the sayings: "Raise the stone and thou shalt find me, cleave the wood and there I am." A large number of utterances are ascribed to Jesus in Gospels and other writings of Gnostic origin; but it is more than doubtful whether any of them have the faintest claim to authenticity. It is certainly possible that maxims of Jesus which never found their way into the New Testament were long in circulation. The teaching of the church for nearly a century was almost wholly by word of mouth, and the collectors to whom we owe the written record

[7] Acta Phil. xxxiv *cf.* Acts of Peter, 38.

may have overlooked much that was preserved in the oral tradition. It appears certain, too, that written collections were in existence which were not used by our evangelists, although they were known to Clement of Rome and the author of the Didache. These stray compilations may have supplied a few of the sayings which are quoted in the later literature; but the probability is that nearly everything that was remembered of Jesus' teaching in the generation after his death has been included in our Gospels. These were composed when the work of collecting the scattered elements of oral tradition had been practically finished, and it is not likely that they left much to later gleaners. It is significant that the sayings preserved in Clement and the Didache are all found, though with some minor differences, in our Gospels, and the inference may safely be drawn that the various collections were made up of substantially the same material. In almost every instance where an entirely new saying appears in the patristic literature it bears on the face of it clear marks of inferiority, or at least of a type of thought quite alien to that of Jesus.

The New Testament itself, apart from the Gospels, has little to tell us about the teaching of Jesus, and this has often been regarded as strange, and even suspicious. Paul and the other writers might have spared themselves much labored argument by simply quoting some clear pronouncement of Jesus, but invariably they leave it out of account. Must we not conclude from this that they were ignorant of the teaching, or that they deliberately broke away from it? But the real explanation of their silence is perhaps to be found in that belief in the Spirit which was general in the early church. The men who wrote our New Testament were all convinced that they possessed the Spirit in peculiar measure, and this was the very reason why they undertook to write for the instruction of their

brethren. Assured that the Spirit was speaking through them they were not satisfied with merely repeating what Jesus had said in his lifetime. They thought of themselves as his ambassadors, whom he had entrusted with a new and immediate message.

It is not true, however, that the teaching of Jesus has left no trace in the later books. The Epistle of James has many points of contact with the Sermon on the Mount, and occasionally repeats its actual words. In the book of Acts one saying is quoted which is not found in any Gospel, and which is perhaps the one additional saying that bears an unquestionable stamp of genuineness.[8] Paul, in at least four passages, expressly refers to words of Jesus.[9] It is noteworthy that in all these passages he is concerned not so much with moral judgments as with the practice or belief of the church, and feels it necessary to state the commandment on which it rests. A large number of further instances can be collected in which Paul appears to echo familiar Gospel saying, although he does not directly quote them. There is no reason to doubt that he was well acquainted with the teaching, and was accustomed, like other missionaries, to impart it to his converts. But his testimony is chiefly valuable for the light it throws on the general tenor of the thought of Jesus. To our knowledge in detail he adds little.

The sources on which we are thrown back are thus the four Gospels; and here again a reservation must be made. It may now be regarded as practically certain that the Fourth Gospel was written after the end of the first century, and that it presents the life of Jesus, not in a strictly historical fashion, but under the light of a given theology. It is not so much a record as an interpretation. Modern opinion has indeed

[8] Acts 20: 35.

[9] I Cor. 7: 10; I Cor. 9: 14; I Cor. 11: 24; I Thess. 4: 15.

swung away from the last century position that the Gospel has no historical value. The evangelist plainly has an interest in the facts of the life of Jesus as well as in their religious significance, and on some points, especially in his narrative of the Passion, he seems to have access to a better tradition than the Synoptists. Much recent criticism has taken the line that the Gospel is composite, and ingenious efforts have been made to distinguish the various strands from which it is woven together. Its unity is too apparent for these efforts to be successful; yet they have gone far to prove that the writer, although he has suffused everything with his own peculiar thought, may have had some earlier document to work on. If this be so it is not improbable that genuine sayings of Jesus, neglected by the Synoptists, have found a place in the Fourth Gospel. None the less the Johannine teaching belongs to a different world of thought from that of the other records. Jesus is occupied throughout, not with the moral law, but with a mystical doctrine of his own Person and of the divine life which he imparts. That he taught such a doctrine, even in the inner circle of his disciples, is hardly possible, for it is strongly Hellenistic in character, and rests on assumptions which are quite foreign to the Synoptic teaching.

The Fourth Gospel, therefore, cannot be employed as a primary document. Authentic sayings may be incorporated in it, but we can never be sure of them. The evangelist, if he has made use of earlier records, has everywhere revised them so freely that his work as we now have it is all of one piece. At the same time he has entered profoundly into the spirit of Jesus' ethical teaching, and his account of it is in one respect of the highest value. He brings it into vital relation to the religious message, so that the demand for brotherly kindness and keeping of the commandments is grounded in the doctrine of the new life. As we read

the Synoptic Gospels this connection of the ethic with the religion is apt to be forgotten, but the Fourth evangelist compels us to keep it always before our minds. He indeed presents the religion under forms of thought which cannot have been those of Jesus; but he has apprehended the inner purpose of Jesus with a matchless insight and brings the moral teaching into the light of it. It would hardly be too much to say that in this manner he supplies the key to the other Gospels.

For almost all our direct knowledge of the teaching we are dependent on Matthew, Mark and Luke. These Gospels have been formed, as modern criticism has demonstrated, by the mingling of two streams of tradition, which dealt respectively with the words and the acts of Jesus. The two streams could not, indeed, be kept entirely separate. It was impossible to recount the acts without some reference to the words which usually accompanied them; while many of the words were unintelligible unless the occasion on which they were spoken was at least indicated. But in the main the distinction was observed, and was a natural and necessary one. It was claimed for Jesus that he was the Messiah, and in order to make good this claim the missionaries had to tell who he was, how he had acted, how he had died for the world. He had also been a great teacher,—the originator of a rule of life which was binding on his followers. A record was drawn up of this side of his activity, and was intended not so much for the unbelieving world as for those who had already accepted him.

Our Gospels, then, represent the fusion of these two traditions. Mark, the earliest of them, can hardly have been written in its present form until more than a generation after Jesus' death. For the most part it is a narrative of his acts,—based, there is reason to believe, on the reminiscences of Peter; but the evange-

list takes occasion to include a certain amount of the teaching. He doubtless felt that this was necessary for a right understanding of the life and character of Jesus, although it is difficult to say why he gives so little of the teaching, or on what principles he makes the selection. Perhaps he was anxious not to overload his simple, impressive narrative with discourse; or perhaps when he wrote he had access only to a limited number of sayings. Matthew and Luke incorporate in their Gospels almost the whole of Mark's work, and interweave with it a full account of the teaching. It has generally been assumed in modern Gospel criticism that for this purpose they both employed the same document,—a manual now lost which consisted almost entirely of words of Jesus, and which is commonly designated by the symbol Q. Taken in a large sense this theory is probably correct. The additions which Matthew and Luke make to Mark are for the most part sayings of Jesus, and a great number of them are found to be almost verbally the same in both evangelists. The presumption is that they made use of a common source. Within recent years, however, scholars have become by no means so sure as they once were of its nature. It was formerly taken for granted that Q was a regular book, similar in character to Mark's Gospel, and various attempts were made to reconstruct it. Now it is frankly acknowledged that even if there were a book of this kind we have no means of ascertaining its scope and contents. Matthew and Luke have indeed some two hundred verses in common, but each of them may have drawn separately on the lost book, to an extent which we cannot guess. Even for the material which they both use they may have been indebted in some measure to other sources. Doubts have further arisen as to whether Q ever existed in a regular form. If Matthew and Luke employed such a work they must have known it in ver-

sions considerably different, for in their record of the sayings they often vary, and the variations are sometimes so great as to affect the whole meaning of a passage. The most probable theory is that there was no uniform manual of the sayings. Need had been felt from an early date for some written record of the things that Jesus taught, and a short collection had been thrown together to which additions had been made from time to time in different communities. Matthew and Luke, and possibly Mark before them, all used a work which was fundamentally the same, but in each case it was different in extent and arrangement, and presented even the same material with various modifications. The whole question has been complicated in recent years by the enquiry into the language in which the sayings were transmitted. It has been virtually proved that the original document was in Aramaic; for not only does the style throughout bear a strong Semitic coloring, but in a number of words and phrases a misunderstanding of Aramaic idiom can be detected. At what time was the translation made from Aramaic into Greek? How far was the record affected by the process? Did Matthew and Luke, or either of them, have access to it in the original language? On these questions, which all have an important bearing on our estimate of the Gospels, opinion is still in flux.

Whatever may have been the nature of the documents used by the evangelists there can be no reasonable doubt that the sayings contained in them were spoken by Jesus. They can be traced back to the primitive age of the church, when many were still living who had listened to him and who treasured his words. The very differences in the record, as we find it in the three Gospels, may be taken as proof of authenticity. We have plainly to do with no official work, which might have been fabricated in the inter-

ests of the church, but with actual memories which had come down by different channels. No doubt in the course of transmission the sayings underwent some changes. They were adapted, more or less consciously, to later conditions, and maxims crept in which seemed to be characteristic of Jesus, although they had really come from other teachers. Everybody knows how easily a man who utters striking sayings is credited with many which he never spoke; and it is more than likely that even the earliest collection contained some things which were not strictly verified. Yet the record as a whole may be accepted as faithful to the teaching of Jesus. Criticism, which has often been regarded as purely destructive, has on this point increased our confidence in the Christian tradition.

Besides the collection of sayings Matthew and Luke make use of a number of sources of a more fragmentary, and often of a less trustworthy kind. The most interesting and valuable is a document employed by Luke alone, consisting for the most part of parables, or of incidents akin to parables. Luke's use of this source is chiefly discernible in the central portion of his Gospel, but he may also have drawn upon it elsewhere. There is no means of determining where he found it, or what was its origin or purpose. It differs from all the other records which went to the making of our Gospels by the absence of any theological drift. Jesus does not appear in the character of Messiah, but is simply a moral and religious teacher of wonderful charm and insight. In such parables as the Prodigal Son and the Good Samaritan he sets forth the primary truths of divine love and human duty; in the incident of Martha and Mary he points to the true end of life. The very fact that this source makes so little of the distinctive Christian message is a proof of genuineness. As time went on the thought of the church became more and more concentrated on Jesus' claim to Mes-

siahship, and all his teaching was viewed in relation to it. Luke's special source cannot be the product of this later period. It can only be accounted for on the ground that it goes back to reminiscences which had not yet been touched by theological reflection. Wherever it came from it is valuable in the highest degree. More than anything else in the Gospel record it takes us into the mind of Jesus, and helps us to understand the attraction he exercised as a teacher.

Of the more fragmentary traditions behind our Gospels some may already have been committed to writing, others would be handed down uncertainly by word of mouth. It is impossible to distinguish in detail this extra material. Since we do not know the full extent of Q and of Luke's special source we can never tell whether a given saying may or may not have been included in them. Allowance, however, has always to be made for this strain of secondary tradition in the Gospels. Its value must be regarded as inferior to that of the written sources, in which the words of Jesus were put on record while they were still freshly remembered.

Our knowledge of Jesus' teaching has thus come to us along a variety of channels, and it cannot be contended that all of them are equally trustworthy. One of the chief services of criticism has been that it has enabled us to sift our evidences, and so to obtain a clearer vision of Jesus as he actually lived and taught. But taken as a whole the record may be accepted as essentially true to fact; and for this conclusion we are not wholly dependent on methods of literary analysis. It is significant that all our accounts of Jesus' ethical teaching are in perfect harmony. They have come from many quarters, and do not borrow from each other, but they all carry the same stamp. If we take as our touchstone sayings which may be indubitably ascribed to Jesus we find in them just the same ele-

ments as mark the teaching generally. We have not to do with a miscellaneous collection of pious maxims, but with a consistent body of thought, which everywhere displays the same spirit and the same attitude to life. As to the authenticity of this particular utterance or that, there will always be difference of opinion, but no one can seriously doubt that the main principles of the message of Jesus have been faithfully preserved in our Gospels.

If further evidence were needed it is supplied in those later New Testament books in which the words of Jesus are hardly ever directly quoted. The writers of the second and third generations, while they express themselves in their own language, are always in full accord with the ideas of Jesus as we know them from the Gospels. These had become the common property of the church, the acknowledged basis of all its morality. All Christians were aware that Jesus had taught these things, and that those who professed to follow him must think and act in this way. To question the authenticity of the Gospel teaching is therefore a futile task. It may rather be affirmed that even if the Gospels had perished altogether we should still know, almost as well as we do now, the kind of morality which Jesus taught and practised. We should not, indeed, possess his teaching in his own incomparable words, but in view of the consensus of all his followers since the beginning we could still be certain of the nature of his new righteousness.

CHAPTER II

OLD AND NEW IN THE ETHIC OF JESUS

FROM the beginning it was recognized that Jesus had come forward with a new message. The people were conscious even in his lifetime that he was not like the scribes, who handed down what they had received from others; and out of this feeling that he was an innovator arose the bitter antagonism which brought about his death. When the message was proclaimed by the early church it was likewise the fact of its newness that caught the world's attention and awakened its suspicion. By their acceptance of Jesus as Lord men were committed to a mode of life which ran counter to all traditional practice. Their strange opinions might have been tolerated or even welcomed in that age of eager speculation; but their behavior marked them out as dangerous. It has often seemed inexplicable that the Christians, who stood for purity and righteousness in a corrupt world, were condemned in their own time as bad men, whom it was necessary at all costs to put down. But from the ancient point of view this judgment of them, on the part not only of the ignorant multitude but of the nobler minds of heathenism, was a just one. They had thrown off obligations which all men had agreed to count sacred, and acted on principles which threatened sooner or later to dissolve society. They had first to create new moral standards before they could be fairly judged.

Jesus, then, was the pioneer of a new morality, but its newness has often been misunderstood. It has

been supposed that everything he taught must somehow have originated with himself,—that before him men had known nothing of the true way of life and that all his precepts on even the simplest moral duties were of the nature of revelation. Few things have been so disturbing to the faith of many pious souls as the discovery that much of Jesus' teaching was anticipated by thinkers before him. There can no longer be any doubt that he was content often to borrow his thought, and even his language; and on this ground it has been argued that he was in no sense an originator but only a reviser and adapter. All that he did was to take over what was best in existing morality and present it in simpler and more attractive form. This question of his originality will concern us presently, but meanwhile let us observe that it is commonly discussed, on one side or the other, from a wrong point of view. The originality of a moral teacher cannot be like that of an inventor or explorer, who forfeits his claim if it can be shown that another has preceded him. If the teaching of Jesus had been wholly new, the product of his own single mind, this would only prove that it was eccentric and worthless. The great principles of the moral law have been apparent to earnest men in all times. They are bound up with the facts of life, and no one has ever reflected seriously on life without catching some glimpse of them. We know them to be valid for no other reason than that they have approved themselves, age after age, not merely to exceptional men but to the common experience of the race. It need not surprise or trouble us to find Jesus repeating the maxims of earlier teachers, sometimes in almost identical words. How could he do otherwise?

In so far, then, as the teaching was borrowed, what were its main sources? Attempts have been made to connect it directly with various Oriental systems,—

Indian, Persian, Egyptian. Ancient literatures have been diligently searched for this purpose, and passages have been found in them which bear a close resemblance to familiar verses in the Gospels. It may indeed be that in the period after the Exile, when the Jews were thrown into close intercourse with other Eastern nations, they borrowed more than they knew. Occasionally in the parables of Jesus affinities can be traced with Persian or Arabian fables, and they need not be set down to mere coincidence. Nothing travels so far, or turns up in such unexpected places, as a popular story. But in the main the analogies of which some writers have made so much are not due to any immediate suggestion. Jesus was confronted with the same ethical and religious questions which had forced themselves on previous thinkers in many lands; and it cannot be wondered at that he answered them sometimes in the same way.

This is likewise the explanation of most of those parallels with Greek wisdom which have often been noted in the Gospel teaching. It is impossible to read Plato and the Stoic moralists without being arrested continually by ideas and even definite phrases which have their counterpart in the Gospels. Sometimes the similarity may be more than accidental. The evangelists wrote at a time when the Gentile mission was in full progress, and may have recast some of the sayings of Jesus in such a manner as to conform them to well-known maxims of Greek morality. But for the most part there can be no real question of borrowing. As soon as we begin to analyze the apparent resemblances we discover that Jesus and the Greek thinkers, although they sometimes arrive at the same idea have traveled by different paths and are strangers to each other.

The two great sources on which Jesus undoubtedly drew were the Old Testament and the teachings of

later Judaism. His debt to the Old Testament does not need to be set forth in detail. It is clear that his mind was saturated with the thought of the Psalmists and Prophets—so much so that it is often difficult to tell whether he is consciously quoting from them or making a statement of his own. Some modern writers have tried to construe his mission as little more than a prophetic revival. It was the great achievement of the prophets that they broke up the ceremonial religion of their time, and taught that the true service of God must consist in moral obedience; and the aim of Jesus was similar. In face of the growing encroachments of the Law he recalled the people to the elementary moral demands. A view like this can certainly not be accepted as the whole explanation of the gospel, but in some measure it is justified. Jesus, as men recognized in his lifetime, was in the succession of the prophets. In a real sense he took up their work, and it was no matter of chance that he availed himself so often of their thought and language.

But even more than to the Old Testament he was indebted to later Jewish reflection. It is customary to think of Judaism after the Old Testament period as merely derivative, and we indeed search vainly in the later literature for anything comparable in power and freshness to the Old Testament books. Yet in many ways the advance on earlier thought is unmistakable. Moral perceptions have become finer and deeper; the relations of man to God and to his fellow-man are conceived in a larger spirit. The book of Ecclesiasticus is written by one who delights in goodness for its own sake, apart from those prudential motives which count for so much in the book of Proverbs. The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs give a cardinal place to virtues like forgiveness, which hardly come within the range of Old Testament thought. It is to this later Jewish morality that the teaching of Jesus im-

mediately attaches itself. Not improbably he was acquainted with Ecclesiasticus, and an echo of its language may occasionally be traced in some of his best-known sayings. There may have been other collections of moral counsels and warnings which likewise influenced him. But his dependence would not be so much on books as on the maxims which were handed down orally in the instruction of the Synagogue and in everyday life. Luke's story of the boy Jesus in the Temple is doubtless a true picture of the manner in which the best part of his education, in the narrower sense of the word, was acquired.

For nearly every one of the Gospel sayings an analogy has been discovered, sometimes fanciful, sometimes almost verbally exact, in the Rabbinical literature. Unfortunately there is no means of dating this literature with any precision, and it may be that much of it is comparatively late, and has no real bearing on the study of the Gospels. Yet there is good reason to believe that the broad features of Rabbinical teaching in the time of Jesus are preserved in the extant literature. To a Western mind it is wearisome and pedantic: it turns on fanciful interpretations of the Law, and contains a great deal that impresses us as childish. None the less its thought, when we get at at the heart of it, is often beautiful. Ever and again there are flashes of genuine moral insight, expressed in memorable words. Jesus was nurtured on this wisdom of the Rabbis, and had the instinct which enabled him to separate the finer metal from the dross. It was the Rabbis, too, who suggested to him the form of his teaching. Many of them were accustomed to impart their instruction by means of parables, and to sum up their weightier thoughts in concise metaphorical sentences which would fasten themselves in the memory. More than once Jesus employs the Rabbinical method of vindicating some great truth by the

subtle exposition of a text of scripture,—as when he infers the fact of immortality from the use of the present tense in the words "I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." [1] In the substance as well as the form of his teaching he borrowed from the Rabbis, perhaps to a far greater extent than we shall ever know. Sometimes he would take an idea which they had expressed imperfectly, and throw it into new and more striking language. Sometimes, when they had coined a maxim which fully embodied his own thought, he did not hesitate to repeat it, with little or no change. It was not his object to formulate an ethic that should be novel in every detail. Whatever impressed him as true and beautiful in the current teaching he gladly made his own; and thus far it may plausibly be argued that his ethic was molded on the best Jewish morality of his time.

Yet it cannot for a moment be admitted that he merely revised and purified the Jewish teaching. The morality of the Rabbis became in his hands a new morality, and this was never so clearly recognized as by men like Paul, who had come to Christianity fresh from the influences of the synagogue. What was it that marked the ethical teaching of Jesus as in the truest sense original?

(1) One thing is manifest at the outset,—that he imposed a unity on the moral law such as it had never before possessed. Morality as men had understood it hitherto was comprised in a multitude of precepts, often in radical conflict with each other. This was obviously true of the Jewish Law, and it was true, in a hardly less degree, of the more reasoned system of the Greek moralists. There was no inward formative principle,—nothing but empirical efforts to define the right course of behavior in one contingency and another. The ethic of Jesus is an organic whole.

[1] Mk. 12:26. *cf.* Mt. 22:32; Lk. 20:37.

When we meet with sayings which purport to come from a Pagan moralist it is impossible to judge by any inward criterion whether he may have spoken them. The same man was capable at one time of uttering lofty unworldly maxims, and at another, mean, prudential ones. But we can feel at once whether a saying attributed to Jesus is in keeping with his mind and outlook. His ethic is so much a harmony that a false note immediately jars. In all times the distinction between Christian and non-Christian action has been clear. Life has grown vastly more complex, and the principles of Jesus have had to be applied to a thousand activities which he never contemplated; but the Christian ethic has always been consistent with itself.

(2) Again, morality for Jesus springs out of a new relation to God. It was his aim to inspire his followers with his own absolute trust in the heavenly Father, who is altogether just and good. As children of God they were to subordinate their wills to His will. Their action as moral beings was to be nothing else than the outcome of this obedience. This relation of ethic to religion in the teaching of Jesus will need to be considered more fully; but it may be noted that here we have one of the grand marks of his originality. In Judaism, and especially in the prophetic books, religion and right action are no doubt brought very close together. God is the upholder of righteousness, and only the righteous may stand in His presence. But Hebrew thought never attains to the idea that trust in God is itself the active principle of all goodness. Morality and religion are not inseparable, as in the teaching of Jesus.

(3) A new emphasis is laid on the value of the individual soul. In Hebrew thought it is the nation which is the object of God's favor, and while the later prophets allow a place to individuals they are still

concerned only with Israelites. When Ezekiel declares that every man is condemned or acquitted on his own merits [2] he means that God will henceforth deal with His chosen people one by one and not in the mass. The belief that every human soul is precious for its own sake, that it has its own relation to God and its separate claim on Him, only began with Jesus. "It is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish." [3] The value thus attached to the individual involves a new attitude to all moral problems; and this has always to be remembered in our judgment of those sayings of Jesus which at first sight appear to be little more than repetitions of Old Testament maxims. He transfers to the individual the rights and duties which were formerly associated with the group. For the first time man is considered as a personality, and all his action, whether it affects himself or his fellow-men, is thus fraught with profounder issues.

(4) The moral quality of an act is made to consist in the thought or intention that lies behind it. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus is concerned from first to last with this inwardness which marks the true righteousness. He shows that the sin of murder lies not so much in the deed as in the impulse of hate that prompts it; that adultery springs out of impure desire; that all action is only the expression of something that is within the man. Hence he declares that the good or evil of an act consists wholly in its motive, and that the moral task is nothing else than the right ordering of the inward life. Even the best conduct is worthless when it is only an outward performance for the sake of show or reward, and not the revelation of a man's inner self. Throughout his teaching, therefore, Jesus is occupied solely with the will. He aims

[2] Ezek. 18: 2 *f.*
[3] Mt. 18: 14.

at creating in men a new nature, which will flow out of its own accord into all noble thoughts and deeds.

(5) The ethic of Jesus is positive in its demand. This is pointedly illustrated in the Golden Rule, which is found in the literature of various ancient peoples, but always in the negative form: "Do not to others what you would not have them do to you." The new element in the Gospel precept lies in its positiveness. Men are to take the initiative in their kindness to others, ever mindful of the help they would desire for themselves. From this conception of goodness as free and spontaneous it follows that no limit can be prescribed to it. The old morality was nothing more than a system of checks for the bridling of action; but Jesus requires an impulse which is always urging to something further. Men are to forgive not seventy times but seventy times seven.[4] They are to do good, hoping for nothing again,[5] because goodness is the law of their nature and cannot be restrained. The Gospel morality thus sets up an infinite ideal, and from one point of view this is its weakness. It offers counsels of perfection which are incapable of fulfilment under the given conditions of human life. Yet this is also the secret of its abiding vitality and power. The ideal which its holds before us is one that can never be attained, and which is therefore inexhaustible.

(6) Morality is purified of all extraneous and accidental elements. Jesus himself was "born under the Law," and there is no indication that he ever consciously broke with it. Yet he draws a clear distinction between the essential commandments and those ordinances of ritual and custom with which they were entangled in the practice of the time. By so doing he lifted the spiritual life of the race to a new level. It now became possible to apprehend the moral law in

[4] Mt. 18: 22.
[5] Lk. 6: 35.

its purity. The ceremonial ideas which had served for its protection and which had at last overlaid and obscured it, could now be thrown aside.

(7) Finally, by his own character and example Jesus gave reality to the moral ideal. He was no abstract thinker who formulated an ethical theory. All that he taught was exemplified in himself, so that he stands out forever as the manifestation of the higher life. It is this, more than anything else, which has enabled the Christian morality to impress itself on the world. The nature of right conduct can never be taught by precepts and formulæ, any more than an art can be learned by the bare study of its rules. Moral precepts have meaning only when we see them in action, as the attributes of a living personality. At all times the Christian ethic has resolved itself into the imitation of Christ. His gift, as the fourth evangelist perceived, was nothing else than the communication of his own life to those who accepted him as Lord.

CHAPTER III

THE NATURE OF THE TEACHING

THE Gospels to which we owe our knowledge of Jesus' teaching were compiled about half a century after his death, although they rest on documents of much earlier date. It can be demonstrated that the collection known as Q had undergone frequent revision, as well as translation into Greek, and a development with so many stages must have been long in process. From the beginning the precepts of Jesus had been adopted by the church as its rule of life, and there was a practical need that they should be placed definitely on record. At best, however, the earliest documents must have been fragmentary, little more than stray leaves on which a number of detached sayings were jotted down. In our Gospels these sentences are commonly arranged according to subject, and this arrangement probably goes back to primitive days. For purposes of Christian instruction it was found convenient to have the sayings of Jesus on particular topics grouped together. What had he taught concerning forgiveness, duty to one's neighbor, the use of earthly possessions, the preaching of his message? The grouping, however, is purely artificial, and does not correspond to anything in his actual practice.

The accident that the teaching of Jesus has been transmitted in this manner has had serious consequences. It has been inferred that he set himself to formulate a moral code, and his precepts have been

taken as so many rules which must be obeyed to the letter. When so regarded they can often be shown to be impracticable; while in any case they cover a very narrow field, and leave some of the most important sides of human activity out of account. Criticism of the Gospel morality has usually been governed by this conception of it as a studied attempt to form an ethical system, and the misunderstanding is largely due to the manner in which it is presented. In Matthew, more especially, Jesus appears to speak like a legislator, whose object is to prescribe the right rules of living. His new law is far superior to that of Moses, but is essentially of the same kind.

Fortunately the Gospels themselves afford us the means of correcting this false impression which they convey. It is clear from their whole narrative that Jesus was careful to avoid everything that savored of formality. This, we are told, was one of the reasons of the eager response which was given him. He broke with the old stereotyped methods, and in the form as well as the substance of his message there was a freshness and reality which the people welcomed after the conventions of the synagogue. In his manner of life he threw off all that was stiff and professional. He came eating and drinking, and mingled with men in their ordinary resorts, and made them feel that he was one with them. So in his teaching he did not speak as from a superior height, but was persuasive and natural. Confident of the truth of his message he sought to impress on men that he was telling them of actual things which had an immediate bearing on their lives.

He is represented in the Gospels as now and then delivering set discourses. Mark describes him as teaching from a boat, with the people gathered round him on the shore,[1] and as speaking far on into the

[1] Mk. 4:1.

day to the crowd that sought him in the wilderness.[2] The discourses in Matthew are for the most part composed artificially out of a number scattered sayings, but the so-called Sermon on the Mount appears also in an abridged form in Luke,[3] and perhaps goes back to an address which was remembered in some detail by those who heard it. The tradition that Jesus occasionally discoursed at some length appears to rest on good evidence. It does not follow, however, that he made set orations, with an ordered development of thought. So far as we can judge his method was to take some moral or spiritual truth,—the duty of forgiveness, the efficacy of prayer, God's care for the lost, —and enforce it from various sides, and usually with the help of parables. Again and again in the Gospels we meet with clusters of parables, which were presumably spoken on the same occasion and for the same purpose. Of the sayings which are preserved to us the greater number are brief and sententious, summing up a weighty principle in a few unforgettable words. It is often taken for granted that this was his ordinary mode of speech, but surely the inference is a mistaken one. A long discourse consisting wholly of pointed sentences would have left no effect, and would have carried to an extreme that very stiffness and formality which he was anxious to avoid. Far more likely we are to think of each of the sayings as a text which he expanded and illustrated. He would speak of the need of self-denial in view of the Kingdom, telling parable after parable to show how a smaller object must often be sacrificed for a greater, and would finally drive home the whole discourse in a vivid sentence,—"He that saveth his life shall lose it." We can understand in this way why the sayings that have come down to us are so pregnant and concise. We can understand,

[2] Mk. 6: 34.
[3] Lk. 6: 20-49.

too, how they came to be remembered. Each of them was the summary of a discourse in which it was illustrated from many sides, and perhaps often repeated, so that it impressed itself indelibly.

Jesus imparted his teaching, however, not only in regular discourses but in utterances that were called forth by special occasions. Questions were put to him and he answered them; incidents happened on his journeys or in his intercourse with his disciples, and suggested some reflection. It is clear that he gladly availed himself of these opportunities, which were like parables in real life made ready to his hand. It is clear, too, that these sayings which arose out of actual incidents were most readily remembered. Our Gospels, which often pass over whole weeks of the ministry with a vague formula ("he taught in their synagogues," "he went through their villages teaching"), dwell at length on some little characteristic anecdote. The personal incident had fastened itself in the memory, and carried with it the illuminating word.

A distinction is drawn in the Gospels between Jesus' teaching of the multitude and the more private instruction which he was accustomed to give to his own disciples.[4] That there was such a distinction need not be doubted. One of the chief reasons why he chose a little company of disciples was that he might have men with him who fully shared his convictions and to whom he might speak freely.[5] It is probable that in the closing part of his life he took the disciples into his confidence, and divulged to them, as he could not do to others, the fact of his Messiahship and the dread necessity which it laid upon him. Often it has been assumed that in his moral and religious teaching generally he reserved a special kind of instruction for his

[4] *Cf.* Mk. 4: 34.
[5] Mk. 3: 14.

disciples. Mark himself seems to suggest this; [6] and at a later time the Gnostic sects were based on the theory that he had a secret revelation which he only imparted within the inner circle. Not a few modern writers have maintained the historical character of the Fourth Gospel on the ground that it preserves that other side of Jesus' teaching which was withheld from the world at large. But this assumption may be set aside as altogether fanciful. We are expressly told by the Synoptists that many of the sayings they record were addressed to the disciples, and these in no way differ from the more public utterances. To the disciples Jesus could indeed speak more directly. He could take for granted things which he had to explain to others, and could offer wider and deeper applications of his thought. But the ideas which he expounded to them were the same as those which always possessed him. He kept no esoteric doctrines in reserve. It belonged to the very nature of his message that it was broad and simple and self-evidencing,—hidden too often from the wise and revealed to babes.

There is no indication, then, that Jesus ever tried to co-ordinate his ethical teaching. It has a unity of its own, far more real than that of the most logical system, for all its elements spring from one center and have a living relation to each other. But it was no part of his design to draw up an ethical code, in which the demands of the moral law should be carefully articulated and traced out in all their consequences. Much less did he set himself to formulate a legal code. The business of the legislator is to provide for all cases that may happen, and define the manner in which each of them should be met. This can never be done with real completeness, and every legal code expands, in the course of time, into a huge system of clauses and

[6] Mk. 4: 11.

corollaries. The results of this legalizing of morality were already manifest in Judaism. The memory was burdened with an accumulation of rules; essentials were buried under endless particularities; the more closely the net was woven the easier it was to make loopholes for casuistical evasion. Jesus perceived these mischievous results, and proceeded deliberately on a different plan. Instead of framing laws he stated principles, and made them so few and broad and simple that no one could overlook them. On no subject, with one possible exception which will fall to be considered later, did he lay down a definite rule of action.[7] His aim was to mark out with perfect clearness the great principles of the moral life, leaving men free to apply them, in each particular case, as the occasion required.

It is true that he enounced a large number of precepts which appear to bear directly on given questions of conduct. In every age there have been those who have so understood them, and have tried to follow them out literally. Tolstoi, in our own time, has subjected the whole Christian teaching to a radical revision, on the ground that the church has interpreted vaguely or explained away altogether those words of Christ which were meant to be obeyed to the letter. But when we look more closely into the precepts we find that they are not so much rules as illustrations. In every instance they involve a principle on which all the stress is laid; but it is applied to a concrete example, so that we may not only grasp it as a principle but judge for ourselves how it works.

That the precepts are in no sense rules is still more evident when we examine their character. Jesus delights in putting his thought as sharply as possible, and usually with a touch of paradox or exaggeration. The man who receives a blow must turn the other

[7] *The Law of Divorce*, v., Chap. xiv.

cheek; he must give up his cloak when his coat is taken; he must forgive seventy times seven. The attempt to act literally on these commands has always led to fanatical extremes, and if it were general would soon make any kind of social life impossible. Now it cannot be supposed that Jesus himself was blind to the impracticable nature of such requirements. The temper of the fanatic, as his whole life proves, was quite alien to him; and he purposely expressed himself in that emphatic, paradoxical way in order to enforce the principle as against the mere rule. The law-giver must define exactly how a man should act in given circumstances, and has therefore to hedge the law with provisos and qualifications. Jesus proceeds by just the opposite method. He states his demand in the extremest form, sweeping all compromise out of sight. He is anxious only for one thing,—that men should apprehend his principle without any possibility of mistake. It is for them to reduce it to practice, and to decide how it may best be adjusted to varying circumstances. But first of all they must lay hold of it firmly, in its ideal scope and significance.

The aim of Jesus is further apparent from the fact that so much of his teaching was delivered in parables. We are told that after a certain period in his ministry "he spoke nothing to them without a parable," and the statement is probably to be accepted literally. One reason why he adopted this mode of teaching was doubtless that he could thus seize the popular attention, and make his thought clear and interesting and real. But his parabolic method also proves that his object was not to frame laws but to assert vital principles. From most of the parables it is impossible to extract any formal rule of conduct. If you meet a wounded man by the roadside you will probably help him little if you try to follow in every detail the methods of the Good Samaritan. The parable is

spoken, and so are all the others, to enforce a principle. You must show kindness to those in need, and this is how one man did it, and opportunities will come to you every day when you may do likewise.

In place, therefore, of the multitude of external rules imposed by the Law Jesus laid down a few great controlling principles, and made obedience to them depend on an inward motive. His ethic was not only different from that which had gone before but was in a real sense its antithesis. As Paul truly perceived, Christ was the end of the Law.[8] Yet he made no conscious and violent breach with the old system. He took his departure from the current teaching and expressly claimed that he had not come to destroy the Law but to fulfil it. We have to consider how the new morality, which was so different from the old, was yet based upon it and brought it to consummation.

[8] Rom. 10:4.

CHAPTER IV

THE CRITICISM OF THE LAW

IN the Sermon on the Mount the new commandments are contrasted, one by one, with those which had been given to "them of old time." This contrast is perhaps due to the evangelist himself, or to the primitive church whose traditions he preserves. For the Jews, to whom the gospel was first offered, the one question was "how does it differ from the Law?" and the teaching of Jesus was thrown into such a form as to provide an answer. But the contrast which is drawn so pointedly in the discourse as we now have it was doubtless present in Jesus' own mind. He was himself a child of the Law, and his new conceptions of man's life and duty were formed against the background of those which he inherited. More or less consciously he was always criticizing the Mosaic Law, and the main lines of his criticism may be traced with sufficient clearness not only in the Sermon on the Mount but in his teaching as a whole.

What was his attitude to the Law? It is evident that he never broke with it, as Paul was to do afterwards. His enemies were continually seeking to detect him in violations of the Law, since on this ground alone they could proceed against him, but at most they could only accuse him of trivial offences against the Sabbath regulations. Not only did he observe the set ordinances but he enjoined that reverence should be paid to "those that sit in Moses' seat."[1] His

[1] Mt. 23: 2.

quarrel with the scribes and Pharisees was not because they upheld the Law but because they perverted it. Like his countrymen generally he believed in the divine origin of scripture, and especially of those books of the Law which for all Jews were the core of scripture. It was his main charge against the religious teachers of the time that they had allowed their "tradition" to encroach on the genuine "word of God." [2] For centuries the Law had been expanded and developed in the Rabbinical schools, and these scribal interpretations had come to be accepted as sacred and binding like the written word itself. Against this overgrowth of tradition Jesus made his protest, and it has sometimes been held that he aimed at nothing more than to restore the Mosaic code to its rightful authority. Did he not declare in so many words that he had come to fulfil the Law? [3] Did he not further say, according to Matthew, "Heaven and earth shall pass away before one jot or tittle shall fail from the Law?" [4] If he really spoke these words,—and there is no sound reason for questioning their authenticity,—he asserted that the Law, as it stood in scripture, was eternally valid. Not the most trivial detail in the sacred text could ever be changed.

That Jesus held by the Law need not be doubted. His own religious life had been nurtured by it, and he never ceased to think of it without the profoundest reverence. He took for granted that his teaching was fully harmonious with this Law which had been given by God Himself, and that he was only securing for it a larger and truer fulfilment. So far from trying to abrogate the Law he insisted that his followers should render it an obedience which exceeded that of the scribes and Pharisees. None the less we mistake the

[2] Mk. 7: 8 *ff. cf.* Mt. 15: 3.
[3] Mt. 5: 17.
[4] Mt. 5: 18 to Lk. 16: 17.

meaning of his work altogether when we regard him as merely contemplating a reformed Judaism. Although he was himself unconscious of any quarrel with the Law he made the breach with it inevitable. His enemies were unable to bring any direct charge against him, but in their main contention they were right. The "fulfilment" which he gave to the Law involved in the long run its dissolution.

(1) In his criticism of the legal system he began, then, by enforcing the word of scripture as against the tradition. It might seem as if in doing so he was only upholding the divine ordinances which had been overridden by the "commandments of men"; and this was doubtless his first intention. But his conflict with the tradition meant, on a deeper view, that he was out of sympathy with the whole spirit of legal religion. Given the belief that life must be regulated by a written law the work of the scribes was legitimate and necessary. The Law had been drawn up centuries before, for a race still living under primitive conditions. To make it valid for a later age it had to be constantly amplified and adapted, or it would have choked all natural growth. The scribes might justly claim to be the progressive minds, who were working towards a larger freedom; and a return to the letter of scripture, such as Jesus advocated, would have had no result but to paralyze the life of the people. What he rejected was not, in the last resort, the tradition, but the legal principle which made the tradition necessary. He felt that the service of God was never meant to consist in a number of stated rules, which needed as time went on to be endlessly multiplied and guarded with new clauses and exceptions. Religion was something different from law.

(2) That this was his real motive becomes yet clearer when we find him not only discarding the tradition but making distinctions within the written Law

itself. Allowing as he did that the Mosaic ordinances had all come from God, he held that they were of varying degrees of importance. The regulations on tithes, the minutiæ of the Sabbath ordinances, were not on the same footing with the "weightier matters of the law." [5] By insisting that they must be obeyed to the letter the scribes confused the less with the greater, and lost sight of the main purpose for which the Law had been given. The kernel of the Mosaic system was obviously the decalogue, which put the great moral requirements in the forefront. Jesus declared that these alone were absolutely binding. Whoever was faithful to these cardinal commandments had observed the whole Law, and had secured for himself the life which it offered.[6] In this manner Jesus not only simplified the Law but threw all the stress on its moral elements. He held that all the rest existed for no other purpose than to safeguard those fundamental rules for right living which are laid down in the ten commandments.

(3) But the distinction which he drew between the ritual and the moral law was carried still further. In Judaism, as in all religions of the time, ceremonial and ethical duties were placed on the same level. It was wrong to murder or commit adultery; it was also wrong to eat certain kinds of food, or to lift a burden on the Sabbath. Even Paul seems to regard the Mosaic Law as a unity, which could not be set aside unless the moral as well as the ritual ordinances were cancelled. Jesus declared that the ceremonial element was secondary. He distinguished between the Sabbath law and the law of mercy, and insisted that when they were in conflict with each other the Sabbath law must always give way.[7] On various occasions he

[5] Mt. 23: 23.
[6] Mt. 19: 17.
[7] Mk. 3: 2 *f.*; Mt. 12: 10 *f.*

showed himself careless of the rules about meat and drink and ceremonial purity, and in more than one great saying justified his attitude. "Whatsoever goeth into a man from without cannot defile him:—for from within, out of the heart of man evil thoughts proceed, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries; all these things proceed from within, and they defile the man." [8] This is one of the revolutionary words of the Gospels. It laid down the principle that ritual ordinances are at best external, and do not affect the real issues of man's higher life. By his assertion of this principle Jesus pronounced the doom of the old conception of religion.

(4) Not only did he reduce the Law to the moral code prescribed in the decalogue, but he affirmed that this code itself could be further simplified. All the commandments are summed up in the two primary demands of love to God and love to our fellow-men. There is evidence that the question of the great commandment was not infrequently raised in the Rabbinical schools, and we know that enlightened Rabbis had already fixed on the verse in Leviticus which is quoted by Jesus as the summary of the Law.[9] His answer to the question put to him cannot be regarded as strictly original. But what was new was the clear recognition of all that was involved in thus condensing the Law into a single statement. It never occurred to any Rabbi to challenge the necessity of the thousand other requirements because they could be epitomized in two. Jesus boldly took the view that since the Law was comprised in these primary injunctions all the rest might be left aside. Nothing was necessary but to hold fast to what was essential, and the details would all follow of themselves.

(5) He did not stop, however, with the simplifica-

[8] Mk. 7: 20-23 to Mt. 15: 19, 20.
[9] Mt. 22: 40 *cf.* Levit. 19: 18.

tion of the Law. He perceived that before it could possess a moral and religious value the whole conception of it had to be radically changed. The ten commandments—summarized in the two great duties of love to God and love to men—were indeed binding; but after all they constituted a law which was imposed from without. In the effort to obey them there would always be a conflict between the higher demand and those evil impulses which kept springing out of a man's own heart. And even if obedience were possible it would have no moral worth. The external acts might be blameless but they would be no test of the man himself,—they would have no necessary correspondence with anything in his own nature. The most diligent service to God and man could mean nothing unless it arose spontaneously out of a right will. This is the governing idea of that whole criticism of the Law which occupies the Sermon on the Mount. It is shown that the commandments laid on "those of old time" were all defective because they took no account of the inward quality of moral action. Murder and adultery were forbidden, but nothing was said about hate and lust, and while these were present the wicked acts were always liable to break forth. These, indeed, were the essential part of the acts, which only made manifest what was hidden in the heart. The Law was impotent and meaningless unless it could somehow transform itself into an inward law, capable of controlling those impulses out of which come the issues of life. All through the teaching there is a tacit criticism of the ancient system from this same point of view. Jesus realized that the will is everything, and that it cannot be directed by mere outward rules and prohibitions. As a pious Israelite he never questioned the authority of the Law, which had been given by God, and must therefore contain in it all that was needful for eternal life. But he never ceased to

emphasize its grand defect. It aimed at making men act rightly, but right action must proceed from the heart, and the thoughts of the heart cannot be commanded. Men must be won to an inner obedience, and this involves a radical change of nature. "Ye must turn again and become as little children."

Not only, then, did Jesus reduce the Law to its purely ethical requirements, and simplify even these until they could all be comprised in one or two, but he showed that in the last resort the very idea of law must give place to another. The real task of men was to attain to a moral autonomy. They were to bring their wills into such harmony with the will of God that on every occasion, however new and unexpected, they should know what God desired of them, and do it of their own accord. Christianity has never yet risen to the height of this ideal of Jesus. Paul, indeed, with his clear insight into the central meanings of the Gospel, declared that the Law had now been abolished and had been replaced by the living Spirit; but the church has never found courage to follow him. Within a generation after Jesus' death his message was formulated as a "new law," superior to the old one but still consisting of definite commands. This qualification of the Christian ethic is perhaps necessary. A time may never come when it will be safe to release men from all external law and trust them to the sole direction of their own will. Jesus himself recognized that no man can possess the right will until he has undergone a profound inward change. He made his ethic conditional on his religion.

CHAPTER V

THE RELIGIOUS BASIS

IN the Synoptic Gospels Jesus comes before us as above all else a teacher of righteousness. It might almost appear from many of his utterances as if he protested against the value that was commonly attached to religion. He denounces the Pharisees, with their long prayers and scrupulous ceremonial. He declares that kindness to one's neighbor is more important than sacrifice. He takes constant occasion to show sympathy with Samaritans, pagans, publicans and sinners, who were reckoned outside of the religious pale. It was his insistence on the moral as against the religious obligations which excited the hostility of the scribes and priests and led them to compass his death.

Much has been made in our time of this strongly ethical interest which pervades the Gospels. It is maintained that Jesus was primarily a moral teacher, and that his message was obscured and perverted by the later theological creeds. To be sure he set out from certain religious beliefs, but this must be regarded as little more than an historical accident. The world was still at the stage when religion was made the basis of everything, and morality could not exist apart from religious sanctions. Jesus, like others, was compelled to adopt them, but he resolved them into a matter of form. When his ethic is separated from its religious framework it only becomes more consistent and intelligible.

Now it cannot be denied that in this contention there is some degree of truth. After the death of Jesus, and especially when his gospel had taken root in the Gentile world, it was associated with beliefs and practices which had no place in his own mind. The divine nature was supposed to be different in kind from the nature of man, and through Jesus men sought to undergo a change of being. He was the Son of God, who possessed in himself the higher life, and imparted it to those who were united with him by faith and sacrament. This reading of the gospel, which was embodied in the creeds and was hardly questioned until modern times, was undoubtedly foreign to Jesus. His teaching, as we have now come to see, was not mystical but practical. He knew of nothing that could be placed higher than the moral demands. This does not mean, however, that he taught a morality which had no vital connection with religion, and which could ultimately be severed from it altogether.

Indeed, the more we examine his thought the more we become aware that the moral and the religious elements can at no point be separated. This is just as true of the Synoptic teaching, where the religious ideas often seem to be quite absent, as of the Johannine, where they are made supreme.

(1) In the first place, the assumptions on which he rests his ethic are purely religious. He does not argue, like the philosophical moralists, from the constitution of man's nature and the obligations laid on him as a social being, but stakes everything on postulates of faith. When he seeks, for instance, to determine our duty to our fellow-men he sets out from the conviction that every soul has a value in the sight of God. There must be something in each human being which is worthy of our love and reverence, for God is the Father of all, and in our dealings with others we must ever remember that they are His children. Of this

belief we find scarcely a trace in Jewish or Pagan thought, but for Jesus it is fundamental. In like manner, it is his conception of God which ultimately guides him in all his moral judgments. He dared to break away from all previous standards, assigning the foremost place to virtues which had hitherto been disregarded, or counted as actual defects; and in this bold revision of the accepted morality he relied on nothing else than his knowledge of the nature of God. What are the attributes of God, as we discern them in His treatment of men? These and no others must be deemed the highest. To manifest them in our own lives must be our chief aim and glory. So in this imitation of God he finds not only the norm of moral excellence but the spring of the moral life. In our narrow sphere we are to act as God does in His, "that we may be children of our Father who is in heaven." [1] Conscious of His mercy and justice we are to deal in a like spirit with our fellow-men, and so realize in ourselves something of the divine nature. It would be easy to show that the ethic of Jesus is bound up everywhere with his faith in God. He came forward as a moral teacher for no other reason than that he was possessed with that faith and sought to make it the grand motive in the life of the world. To separate his morality from his religion means nothing else than to tear it up by the roots.

(2) Again, his demand is not for obedience to certain moral laws but for a new will. Often it has been said that Christianity is all comprised in the plain ethical teaching of the Sermon on the Mount, and this may be granted. But the Sermon on the Mount, when it is rightly understood, is much more than a series of moral precepts. It turns throughout on the idea that morality is inward,—that right action is worthless unless it proceeds from the regenerated will.

[1] Mt. 5: 45 to Lk. 6: 35.

This is always the primary conviction of Jesus. The doctrine of the New Birth, as it is presented in the Fourth Gospel, is molded by alien influences, but essentially it expresses the great conception which also underlies the Sermon on the Mount. For Jesus the one thing necessary was a right relation to God,—a complete harmony of our will with the divine will. He called for no mere reformation, as John the Baptist had done, but for a fresh beginning, a radical change of mind, which would enable men to act rightly because in their inward nature they had become new men.

(3) Once more, Jesus conceived of fellowship with God as consisting in moral obedience; and it is here that we find the vital relation of his religion to his ethic. For later Christian thought God was defined in terms of being. He possessed a life different in kind from ours, and the aim of religion was to enter into fellowship with Him and so participate in the true life. The ideal of Jesus also is communion with God, but he conceives of it in another way. He thinks of God not as the absolute Being, but as the God of love, righteousness, holiness. These moral qualities are His essential nature, and to be one with God can be nothing else than to have in ourselves the will of God. In so far as we attain to goodness, mercy, long-suffering, we truly share in the divine nature,—we have become "children of our Father who is in heaven." There is nothing in the teaching of Jesus that can properly be called *mystical*. No trace can be found of the fundamental mystical idea that since God is immanent in all things He dwells in ourselves, so that at the center of our being we can meet with God. Jesus accepts the Hebrew belief as it appears in the Old Testament that God is the Sovereign who is enthroned in heaven. Our attitude to Him must be one of obedience and reverence, and there can be no

thought of a union with God, such as was contemplated by the later mystics. None the less, the whole teaching of Jesus is grounded in what may be termed an ethical mysticism. He is possessed with the thought of love and goodness as so inherent in the divine nature that by attaining to them we apprehend God. In every act of justice and compassion we become for that moment one with God, and by constant obedience to His will we live the divine life. As men behold our good works they glorify our heavenly Father, for He is Himself thinking and acting through us. It is from this point of view that the ethic of Jesus must be understood, and we misinterpret it altogether when we try to separate it in any way from religion. Right living is not for Jesus an end in itself. His precepts lose all their meaning when they are construed on the ground of any prudential or social philosophy. His thought is always that by living as God requires we become like God, and so realize in ourselves more of the divine life.

CHAPTER VI

THE APOCALYPTIC BACKGROUND

IT is now acknowledged, by almost all New Testament scholars, that the message of Jesus has to be understood against the background of those apocalyptic ideas which were current in his day. John the Baptist had proclaimed that the Kingdom of God,—the new age in which God would assert his sovereignty, was just at hand. Jesus took up the hope on which the minds of the people were now intent, and made it the framework of his gospel.

What is the relation of the ethical teaching to this idea of the coming Kingdom? The view has been put forward by not a few modern writers that the aim of Jesus was nothing more than to provide an "interim ethic,"—a morality that should be valid only for the short interval before the new age arrived. It is argued that such a conclusion is inevitable when we allow for those apocalyptic beliefs from which he set out. He expected that the world as it now is would presently come to an end, and give place to another, in which the conditions of man's life would be wholly different. Of the nature and the requirements of that future age he could say nothing. He was content to teach men how they should order their lives in the remaining period of this age. A little time was still left them before the great crisis, and their fate in the age to come would depend on the use which they made of the respite. John the Baptist had called for repentance in view of the approaching judgment, and

Jesus made a similar demand. The "change of mind" on which he insisted was more radical than that which John had deemed necessary, but like him he was concerned with the interval. His ethic laid no claim to absolute validity.

Now an interpretation of this kind can hardly be avoided if we assume that Jesus pushed the apocalyptic idea to its logical issue. His teaching is obviously intended for the present world, with its trials and dangers and perplexities, and in the coming age the same conditions would obtain no longer. When evil had been done away there would be no occasion for the exercise of patience, forgiveness, care for the poor and miserable. The will of God would be done on earth as it is in heaven, and the precepts offered for our guidance in this imperfect world would all be meaningless. In spite, however, of all logical considerations the theory of an "interim ethic" may be confidently put aside. (1) For one thing it rests on the false hypothesis that the intention of Jesus was to prescribe a number of set rules. His precepts, as we have seen, are rather to be regarded as so many illustrations of great principles, which by their very nature are eternally valid. Love, trust, goodness, cannot but be the highest things in the coming age as in this. The man who gives effect to them amidst the cramping circumstances of the present is not contenting himself with a makeshift morality. He is following out, in the face of all difficulties and limitations, the will of God as it must always be. (2) Again, while the apocalyptic element in Jesus' teaching must be fairly recognized, it cannot be pressed in any rigid and one-sided way. The more we examine his attitude to the current beliefs, the more we realize that he did not allow himself to be fettered by them. Jewish apocalyptic, as we know it from the surviving books, was not a formal system. There are certain broad ideas which pervade apocalyp-

tic as a whole, but the different writers all feel themselves at liberty to modify them in the interest of the practical message which they have in mind. Are we to require of Jesus alone that everything in his teaching must be subordinated to certain fixed apocalyptic beliefs? It may far more justly be maintained that although he fell in with the traditional outlook on the future his thought was in inward contradiction to it, and that not a few of the difficulties which beset his teaching are in this way to be explained. Apocalyptic, in all its forms, was the outgrowth of a profound pessimism. For the time being God seemed to have withdrawn from the government of the world, and all hope must be directed to a coming day, when He would suddenly interpose by an immediate act of power. This mode of thinking was not only foreign to the mind of Jesus but was opposed to his innermost convictions. He was confident that God rules the world, and that everything is ordered by Him, so that not a sparrow falls to the ground without His knowledge. This absolute trust in a God who is reigning now, and to whose will we may submit unreservedly, lies at the very heart of the religion of Jesus; and if we conceive of him merely as the herald of a future Kingdom we take the keystone out of his teaching and out of the whole story of his life. His attitude to apocalyptic was, in fact, very similar to his attitude towards the Law. He accepted the Law, and appeared to aim at nothing more than its larger fulfilment; yet his teaching was in principle opposed to the Law, and was bound in the course of time to dissolve it. In like manner he accepted the apocalyptic beliefs and used them as the forms in which he proclaimed his message. But the message itself must in no way be confounded with the forms. In its essence it was in conflict with them, and could not fully unfold itself until it had thrown them off. This, as a matter of

history, was what happened before the first century was over. The message of Jesus, as its true import came to light, was found to have shattered the apocalyptic scheme which had at first seemed vital to it. He himself, like other great teachers, was unable to foresee the full consequences of his own thought; but while he held to the apocalyptic ideas he did not make them primary. He believed in the new will, in the wisdom and goodness of the Father who ordains all things, in the moral forces which in the end will overcome all evil. By means of apocalyptic, and when necessary in spite of it, he sought to proclaim this faith.

It cannot be granted, then, that Jesus intended to teach nothing more than an "interim ethic." Some of his judgments, as we shall presently see, were necessarily colored by the expectation that earthly conditions would soon be transformed; but for his teaching as a whole he claims a permanent value. He calls on men to accept it for no other reason than that it sets before them the divine will, which cannot change. It may be that he was not aware of the contradiction between his ethic and his apocalyptic outlook. Confident as he was that pity and forgiveness were of God, he did not trouble to reflect that in the perfect world of the future there would be no place for them. Or perhaps he thought of these and other virtues as so many applications of the great commandment of love. In the world to come love would fulfil itself in other ways, but in the present these were its requirements, by which it manifested itself just as truly as it would do hereafter. In any case, the real effect of the apocalyptic hope was not to distort and narrow but to intensify the moral demand of Jesus. He was able to point to the great crisis now imminent. A little time more and men would be called to judg-

ment, and everything else must be sacrificed to the imperative task of making their lives right with God. This note of terrible earnestness is everywhere present in the teaching of Jesus. We are made to feel that his message is one of life and death, and that nothing matters but the preparation for the Kingdom.

That he accepted the apocalyptic ideas in a literal sense need not be doubted. He proclaimed the nearness of the Kingdom in the very words which had been used by John the Baptist, and if he had intended them to bear some new allegorical sense he would only have mystified his hearers. Yet in one all-important respect he differed from the earlier apocalyptic thinkers, whose interest was mainly in speculative questions about the coming age,—how and when and where it would be realized, what changes it would involve in the constitution of the world. On all such matters Jesus is indifferent. His one concern is with the moral government of that new order when men will be brought into a closer relation to God. It would hardly be too much to say that he employs the idea of the Kingdom simply as a means of envisaging the moral law more clearly. From the world of the present, in which life is so thwarted and frustrated, he lifts his mind to the great future, when the will of God can be fully realized. How will men act then? What will God require of them, when they are able at last to obey Him without hindrance? From the time of Plato onward thinkers who have meditated on the true social order have tried to imagine for themselves an ideal Republic, in which all that now hampers the operation of Law will have disappeared. This, it may be said, was also the method of Jesus; but he did not need to transport himself in fancy to some Utopia which would afford the perfect conditions for moral obedience. He took over the hope of the Kingdom which had long been current among his people, and

which he himself shared. The day was at hand when the will of God would be done on earth as in heaven, and he set himself to interpret it in the light of that coming time. By means of the apocalyptic hope he secured a point of vantage, from which he could apprehend the moral law in its absolute form.

For Jesus as for John the Baptist and the people generally the Kingdom lay in the future, and was to come miraculously, by the direct act of God. From some of the sayings it has been inferred that he thought of it as already in some degree present; and certainly he had little sympathy with the apocalyptic doctrine that for the time being God had left the world to itself, and would only put forth His power in the coming age. He was confident that the forces which would triumph in the future were working even now, like seed or leaven, and that men could work along with them. But in his teaching as a whole he acquiesces in the belief that the Kingdom is future. It lies before us as the goal towards which we are marching, the hope and ideal to which we aspire. "Thy Kingdom come" is the central petition of the Lord's prayer. Even if it could be proved that he thought of the Kingdom as in some sense begun, this idea of its futurity would still be his dominant and characteristic one In like manner he falls in with the traditional belief that the Kingdom would come miraculously. He allowed, perhaps, for an element of human coöperation in so far as men might prevail on God, by prayer and repentance and earnest longing, to hasten His purpose before the appointed day. There are signs that one of his chief aims was to awaken this desire which would bring the Kingdom nearer; and it may be that he thought of his own death as an offering to which God would respond by shortening the days. None the less, the coming of the

Kingdom is God's act, and all that men can do is to wait on God and beseech Him to anticipate the set time. In our modern religious language we often speak of "advancing" or "building up" the Kingdom by means of missionary and social work; and this mode of thought may be partly justified by the attitude of Jesus himself. He required that men should put themselves in readiness to welcome the Kingdom. He took for granted that by all service in his cause they would prepare the way for the great manifestation of divine power. But his idea has in some respects been obscured and distorted by our modern interpretations. It is commonly assumed, more or less consciously, that men themselves must bring the Kingdom into being. The very program of Christianity, as it is often understood in our days, is to establish the Kingdom of God on earth by the concerted effort of all good men. To Jesus this conception would have been meaningless, and even repellent. The Kingdom, as he knew it, was God's, and men could no more establish it than they could make the sun rise in heaven. To keep this clear in our minds is vital for our whole understanding of Jesus. His attitude was always that of waiting upon God, of trust in a divine power and wisdom which are working on our behalf and will accomplish for us what we cannot do ourselves.

It might appear at first sight as if this attitude were incompatible with that strenuous service which Jesus himself demanded of his followers. There have certainly been times when Christian men were content to lapse into a mere quietism. Believing that God alone could bring in the better age they have refused to do anything, and have allowed the worst evils to go on unhindered, taking credit to themselves for this pious resignation. Often it is maintained that the chief advance in our modern religion consists just in

this,—that we no longer look for a Kingdom which God will inaugurate in some supernatural way. We have learned to understand that He works through men and women, and that if His Kingdom is ever to come we must build it for ourselves. One may question, however, whether this gospel of man's self-sufficiency will, in the long run, do much to strengthen the impulse towards practical endeavor. Thoughtful men are beginning to feel already that the deeper wisdom lay with Jesus, who believed that the one sustaining motive was confidence in God. In the knowledge that He is with His people, that of His own good pleasure He will give them the Kingdom, they are to find their strength.

For one thing they can set their hope on a future in which His cause is certain to triumph. Their struggle against the giant forces of evil may seem utterly vain, but amidst all failure they can remember that He has promised the Kingdom, and will Himself, in His own time, establish it. In all ages Christian men have been supported by this conviction. If they had thought of the Kingdom as depending wholly on their own poor efforts they would have judged their task impossible and given it up in despair. They have persisted and overcome because they were content to wait on God.

Not only so, but they have realized that even in the present God was helping them. When he pointed to that Kingdom which God would at last establish, Jesus expressed his faith in a divine purpose which was moving through history. Men were not to imagine that they were left to themselves to plan out a better world and forward it as best they might. They were to think of themselves as working towards a fulfilment which God had ordained. They were to answer every call to noble endeavor with the uplifting sense that the power which directs all things is on

their side. The aim of Jesus, it must ever be remembered, was not merely to teach the moral law but to inspire men with a high enthusiasm for it; and this he did by his proclamation of the Kingdom. It did not mean that they were to stand by passively until God fulfilled His promise, but that they could count on God. Knowing that even now His Kingdom was at hand they could throw themselves into His service with all their heart.

The teaching of Jesus was thus determined by the hope of the Kingdom which God Himself would bring in. This hope, as we now can recognize, had grown out of the peculiar conditions of Jewish thought and history, and was not destined in its literal form to fulfilment. None the less it stood for the great conviction which must always lie at the heart of religion. Just as science is built up on the assumption that there are certain unalterable laws to which all things must conform, so religion springs from the faith in the sovereignty of God. The world can have no meaning unless we believe that God reigns, and that He will bring everything at last into subjection to His will. Jesus looked for that great consummation, and in view of its coming he offered men his new righteousness. They had shaped their lives hitherto by the requirements of this world, which was soon to pass away. He summoned them to leave old things behind them, and prepare themselves for the new order of the Kingdom of God.

CHAPTER VII

RENUNCIATION

THE teaching of Jesus is little affected, in its inner substance, by the apocalyptic ideas which form its background, but in one direction they exert a powerful influence. Those who seek the Kingdom are required to surrender everything,—their earthly possessions, their old activities, even the ties of friendship and family. Unless they are prepared to make these sacrifices they are pronounced unworthy of the name of disciples. In some of the most memorable of the incidents and sayings Jesus enforces this call to forsake all and follow him.

It is not surprising that this aspect of the teaching has impressed the world, more almost than any other. At various times, and more particularly in mediæval types of piety, the Christian rule of life has been construed as fundamentally ascetic. The idea persists in our own day that Christianity means the abandonment of so-called worldly interests. Sometimes it is condemned on this ground as morbid and anti-social. More often the reproach is urged against it that it has compromised with the world, and so has been false to itself and to the clear intention of Jesus.

Now it cannot be too strongly affirmed, however we interpret this strain in his teaching, that with the ascetic ideal he had no sympathy. Asceticism was the product of a given philosophy, which drew a sharp line between the spiritual and the material. Matter

as such was regarded as inherently evil, and the chief aim of the "spiritual man" was to sunder, as far as possible, every link which bound him to the material world. This philosophy came in from the East, ultimately, perhaps, from India; and obtained a strong hold on the Western mind in the early centuries. It was adopted by a number of the Gnostic sects, and gave rise at a later time to monasticism in its various phases; but there is no sign that Jesus was ever touched by it. He never suggests that earthly things are in their nature evil. On the contrary he speaks of them invariably as God's gifts to His children, and points to them in many beautiful sayings as the evidences of His goodness and His care for men. "Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of these things." [1] If they are to be sacrificed it is not because they are in themselves harmful, but because they stand in the way of other things, which are still more necessary.

The call for renunciation has mainly to be explained from the apocalyptic hope. A day was already near when the existing order and all that belonged to it would be dissolved, and in view of this approaching crisis it was folly for men to entangle themselves with the things of this world. Not only would they spend their labor in vain, but they would so bind themselves to the old order that they could not make ready for the new one, or even honestly desire that it should come. On this side of his thought we can indeed recognize an "interim" element in the ethic of Jesus. He is influenced not so much by absolute considerations as by the requirements of apocalyptic theory. Not a few of the sayings on renunciation must be judged in this light. They were spoken for the direction of his followers in the unique emergency which was now, he believed, in front of them. To insist on

[1] Mt. 6: 32.

their permanent validity would be much the same as to place on the statute-book orders that were issued in time of war.

We have seen, however, that Jesus never allowed himself to be fettered by apocalyptic ideas when they conflicted with his essential message. Detachment from the present world was a logical consequence from the hope of the Kingdom; but for this reason alone he would not have called for it so earnestly. When we look more carefully into the various passages in which he reiterates his demand that a man must forsake all that he hath, it is not hard to distinguish several ideas, of far-reaching import, which were in his mind.

(1) He was convinced for one thing, that the spiritual interests were paramount. It profited a man nothing to gain the world and lose his soul.[2] Whatever might interfere with those greater ends of life must be sternly relinquished, however precious and necessary it might be. It was in this certainty that he himself had abandoned everything for the cause of God, and he bade his followers do likewise. They must be ready to part not only with earthly goods but with their dearest friendships or with eye or hand, if in this way only they could save their true life. Renunciation in itself has no value. Jesus would have found no merit in the self-inflicted sufferings of the early monks, and would probably have condemned them as ministering to spiritual pride. Surrender must be always for the sake of a larger good. The merchant does not fling away his pearls but sells them, in order to buy that one which is of great price.[3] Earthly things are good, and Jesus never pretends to despise them, but he insists that the spiritual ends must be made supreme. Whatever a man possesses he must

[2] Mk. 8:36; Mt. 16:26.
[3] Mt. 13:46.

be willing to sacrifice for the purpose of winning entrance into the Kingdom of God.

(2) Again, he perceived that wealth, prosperity, worldly security, have the effect of deceiving men as to their true position. Surrounded with those visible protections they believe that no danger can touch them, yet the safety is all the while illusory. The earthly things on which they rely may vanish in a moment, and when these are gone they find themselves quite helpless. This is the thought which is expressed so vividly in the parable of the rich man who counts over his possessions and imagines himself secure for many years, while his soul is to be required of him that very night.[4] Other sayings in which wealth appears to be condemned for its own sake are to be interpreted in a similar way. A rich man can hardly enter into the Kingdom of heaven, since he is blinded by his riches to the real conditions of life. The poor are blessed, not because they are poor, but because they know their helplessness. They are compelled to realize from hour to hour that they are in God's hands, and must set their hope on God.

(3) Once more, the demand for self-denial is only the other side of the primary demand for entire obedience to the will of God. The servant of God must give up all personal interests and ambitions, and hold himself prepared to answer the call of God without reserve. He must be ready to sacrifice not only his most cherished possessions but his very life. "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." [5] "Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it, but whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it." [6] "Whosoever would be first among you shall be servant of all; for verily the

[4] Lk. 12: 16 *f.*
[5] Mk. 8: 34.
[6] Lk. 17: 34 *cf.* Mk. 8: 35; Mt. 16: 35; Jn. 12: 25.

Son of man came not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." [7] The law of self-sacrifice, as it is laid down in such sayings, and is exemplified in the life of Jesus himself, lies at the very heart of the Christian message. Taken in the widest sense it is the law which has always governed human life, and which is embodied in the whole constitution of nature. For Jesus, however, it is bound up with the idea of obedience. The true disciple must forget himself utterly in his absolute loyalty to the will of God. He must renounce everything that seems to make life desirable, and, if need be, life itself. But this renunciation is the necessary condition of a greater good. By denying himself a man becomes capable of the service of God, and only in this service can he truly fulfil himself. "He that loseth his life shall find it."

The call for renunciation is connected, in various passages, with the idea of helpfulness to our brothermen. The rich young ruler must not merely abandon his possessions but sell them and give to the poor. The disciples, when they surrender the old ties and interests, devote their energies to the great work of the mission. Jesus is always intolerant of mere waste. He is careful to insist that whatever is sacrificed should accrue to the good of others. But this application of his thought is incidental; and it is primarily for their own sake that men are to make the act of renunciation. If they look for the Kingdom they are to seek it with a single heart, and divest themselves of everything that might bind them to this world.

[7] Mk. 10: 35.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SOCIAL AND PERSONAL MOTIVES

IT is not surprising that in these days, when the one imperative task is the rebuilding of the social order, the social elements in the gospel should be emphasized, almost to the exclusion of all others. The church, we are told, has misunderstood or perhaps wilfully distorted the whole purpose of Jesus' teaching. He has been made the symbol of a mystical piety, while his real aim was social and practical. A man of the people, who himself had known the bitterness of poverty and injustice, he protested against the abuses of power. He looked forward to the union of all men in one great brotherhood, and bade us work for that consummation. He taught us that all right action must spring out of one great motive,—to contribute, in however small a measure, towards the coming of the perfect society of the future.

This reading of the gospel, as we have already seen, rests on a false interpretation of the idea of Jesus. He conceived of the Kingdom, not as something which will come about by human effort, but as wholly dependent on the act of God. Men are indeed to seek the Kingdom in the sense that at every step of their progress they follow the narrow path by which they will enter it. By repentance and prayer and steadfast obedience they may even prevail on God to anticipate the set time. But their part is to wait patiently until God of His own good pleasure brings in the Kingdom.

That the teaching of Jesus was profoundly social there can be no question. The Kingdom was inseparable in his mind from the community that should inherit it, and though he thought of it as future he desired that men should live already as if it were come, and so deal with their fellow-men. To this idea he gave concrete expression by gathering around him a band of disciples, who were not merely to help in the mission but to form the nucleus of the future society, and exemplify, in their intercourse together, those higher relations which would hereafter be universal. The teaching of Jesus was mainly addressed to this company of disciples, and had reference not only to their individual but to their communal life. It has been found ever since that his ethic can only be realized in a society in which men are bound together in the most varied relations; and this is the reason why monastic institutions have always defeated their own end. They sought to guard against all contamination with the world, and so provide the conditions in which the law of Christ might be perfectly fulfilled. But invariably they have failed; and their failure has been due to nothing else than their exclusiveness. For the Christian morality, by its very nature, can only be realized in a society in which all kinds of elements are freely mingled together. This was recognized in the earliest days when the disciples formed themselves into a church. They were aware that only by this coöperation, not merely for worship but for all the ordinary interests of life, could they follow out the precepts of Jesus.

Nevertheless, the social motive was not his primary one. When we contrast his morality with that which had gone before we can see that one of the great advances consisted just in this,—that he no longer made the *group* the governing factor in human action. For pagan sentiment religion was wholly a matter of

civic duty. The city had a right to the boundless devotion of all its people, and in token of this allegiance to the city, all were required to take part in the stated worship of its god. In Old Testament religion, even on the higher levels to which it was raised by the Prophets, Israel is the object of God's favor, and men and women can approach Him only as members of the holy nation. For Jesus men have value in the sight of God not merely as units in a society but as personal beings. In this individualism his social teaching had its roots. He was convinced that each man could call God Father, that every soul had a separate and absolute worth; and from this estimate of the individual two great inferences immediately followed. (1) On the one hand, every man must be willing to acknowledge the indefeasible right of his neighbor. Our dealings with others must ever be determined by the sense that they, like ourselves, are God's children, directly responsible to Him and under His protection. No man is entitled to use another as a tool for his own ends. Against all forms of oppression Jesus utters his sternest denunciations. He declares that it were better for a man to perish utterly than to take advantage of the weak.[1] He makes God's mercy to us conditional on the mercy we show to others. He forbids us even to pass harsh judgments on our neighbors, since God is the one Judge to whom all must give account.[2] In our intercourse with our fellow-men we are to be guided continually by the knowledge that they belong to God, and have therefore a claim to honor, and to the fullest control of their own lives. (2) On the other hand, since every man must be regarded as a person, with an immediate relation to God, it follows that all must constitute a single family. The distinctions of wealth. class,

[1] Mt. 18: 6; Lk. 17: 2.
[2] Mt. 7: 1, 2; Mt. 5: 21; Mt. 12: 37.

position, are unreal, since they do not affect a man's true status as a child of God.[3] In the new age they will cease to exist altogether, and even now we must forget them in our treatment of one another. All are brethren within the family of God. Jesus does not appear to have worked out his conception of a human brotherhood which should transcend all arbitrary divisions; and there is no clear evidence that he applied it to the nations that were outside of his immediate knowledge. Yet it is implicit in all his teaching. Later thinkers have only carried the idea of Jesus to its logical issue when they have looked forward to a world-wide community, in which all men should be included simply as men.

In all ages the teaching of Jesus has been the driving motive in social progress. Again and again the effort to carry it out has changed the face of the world, and in our own day it is working more mightily than ever for the overthrow of political and industrial systems which have outlived their time. It has exercised this power, however, because it was primarily concerned not with the social machinery but with the central meaning of life. Jesus was the first who asserted those rights of human personality which are always in danger of being sacrificed to the interests of the group. He insisted that men are accountable to God, and must have room to serve Him freely, and that the community, whatever form it may assume, must not crush the individual soul. This has ever been the Christian demand, and in the effort to satisfy it the social order has continually to be recast. But Jesus himself did not consciously come forward as a social reformer. The attempt to view him in this light has given rise, particularly of late days, to strange theories against which it is difficult to protest too strongly. His religion as many have presented it is

[3] Lk. 22: 25.

determined wholly by some economic or political doctrine. Some of his greatest sayings have been exploited by one side or another in current controversies in a manner which is false to history as well as to the inner spirit of the gospel. It has always to be remembered that the social problem, as we now know it, did not exist for the ancient world. There was no counterpart to our industrial system. Between the employing and the working class there was no clear distinction, and as a carpenter at Nazareth Jesus himself, like his own disciples,[4] would be at once a workman and an employer of labor. The great social cleavage was that between slave and freeman, and in Palestine, especially in the countryside of Galilee, this was little in evidence. Inequalities of wealth were certainly as common then as now, and Jesus makes constant reference to them. Yet he does not propose to cure them by any change of the economic system. He assumes that with the advent of the Kingdom of God a new order will presently set in, and meanwhile he desires rich men of their own accord to share with the poor.[5]

It cannot be maintained, then, that Jesus aimed at a social reorganization; much less that he made the social motive the primary one in the moral life. To be sure he insists continually on the need for service and sacrifice. He requires that as he came himself not to be ministered unto but to minister, so his followers must look to the good of others. The suppression of all merely personal interests in the advancement of the larger cause belongs to the very essence of his moral demand. Yet the idea which underlies it is always that by denying himself a man gains something for his own soul. "He that would be

[4] *Cf.* Mk. 1: 20.
[5] Lk. 11: 41, 12: 33; Mt. 19: 21.

greatest among you, let him be the servant of all."[6] "He that is last shall be first."[7] "He that loseth his life shall find it." "Blessed are the poor, the meek, the peace-makers, the persecuted, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven." The promises of Jesus always come back to some good that will accrue not to mankind as a whole but to the man himself.

Here, then, more than anywhere else we need to keep in mind the religious basis of his teaching, even when it seems to move wholly within the ethical sphere. He thinks of life always in its relation to God. Man's supreme duty is to serve God, and all his other duties have worth and reality only as they are bound up with this one. It was indeed part of the originality of Jesus that he understood so clearly the interdependence of all human lives. He was aware that no action can be confined in its effects to the person who does it, and that a man can live his own true life only by the exercise of love, mercy, justice, helpfulness, towards his fellows. But he recognizes that in the last analysis man is not a social unit but a soul, responsible to God, and that the sense of this must determine all his thought and action. It is here, therefore, that we must seek for the motive which he would place at the center of the moral life. Sometimes he describes it simply as the desire to please God, who is our Creator and Master, and to whom we owe a limitless obedience. The one end of our being can be no other than to do His will. The satisfaction we aim at, the goal we set before us, can be no other than God's "well done, good and faithful servant." This conception of obedience as an end in itself, the one all-sufficient end of moral endeavor, had always had a place in Jewish thought, and was the chief element of value in the legal system. It would be granted by

[6] Mt. 23:11; Lk. 22:26.
[7] Mt. 19:30.

enlightened Jewish teachers, now as in ancient times, that the rules laid down in the levitical code have little meaning in themselves, or a meaning that cannot be discovered by human reason. They are important not for their own sake but for the obedience which they enable men to render. God has imposed this law on his people in order that they might do what He has commanded, and so attain to the true purpose of man's life. With Jesus, however, this thought of obedience to God takes on a far deeper significance, for he asks us to obey not mere arbitrary rules but those moral principles which belong to the very nature of God. By fidelity to them we grow into likeness to God. It is something to render obedience, even though it yields us no other satisfaction than the knowledge that we have obeyed. But by obedience to the great commandments of love, goodness, holiness, we enter into an actual fellowship with God. "That ye may be children of your Father who is in heaven." This is the grand motive. We are to make our action correspond with that of God Himself, that so we may attain to more and more of the divine nature.

This motive, however, merges in another, or rather may be viewed in another aspect. Since the chief end of life is to obey the will of God, perfect obedience must imply fulness of life. Only as we conform ourselves to that higher will which is the law of our being do we realize our true life; and this, for Jesus, is the ultimate meaning of all moral action. It is this idea which determines his thought even when he appears to insist wholly on our duty to others. God requires of us that we should act as He Himself does, and we can do so only through our intercourse with our fellow-men. But in showing them mercy and kindness we are seeking not so much to make a better world as to realize in ourselves more of the will of

God. By imitating Him we become His children and so attain to our true life.

This motive is often defined by Jesus under the figure of *reward*. Men are exhorted to suffer hardship and make sacrifices in view of the recompense that awaits them in the Kingdom. They are to humble themselves that they may be exalted,[8] to forsake friends and possessions so as to receive them back an hundredfold.[9] It has often been urged as one of the gravest criticisms of the gospel that the motive of reward is thus made prominent. In this respect it has been judged to fall below the level even of the higher pagan ethic, which contemplated the pursuit of virtue for its own sake. But that Jesus did not think of reward in any crude, literal sense is evident from the many sayings in which he condemns the righteousness that springs from this motive. "Do good, hoping for nothing again" [10] is the watchword of all his teaching. His conflict with the Pharisees turns on nothing else than their assumption that the service of God is of the nature of a contract, and any performance beyond what is bargained for must have an additional recompense. In the parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard he plainly declares that the idea of reward can have no place in man's relation to God, who has a right to our utmost service, and can do what He will with His own.[11]

This parable, indeed, brings out the true significance of the various sayings in which Jesus appears to speak of serving God for the sake of a reward. It was assumed in the religion of the time that a recompense was attached to all moral achievement, and Jesus,

[8] Mt. 23: 12; Lk. 14: 11, 18: 14.
[9] Mk. 10: 30; Mt. 19: 29.
[10] Lk. 6: 35.
[11] Mt. 20: 1-16.

after his manner, accepts the current idea and turns it to a new purpose. Men are to look for a reward in their service of God, but what kind of a reward? The vulgar conception of so much payment for so much labor must be abandoned. God's relation to men is different from that of an employer to his hirelings, and He deals with them according to other standards. So in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus falls in with the ordinary assumption that good deeds are wrought for reward, and applies the test "what reward have ye?"[12] to various examples of righteousness. But his object all the time is to show that no acts have moral worth except those that are done freely, out of an uncalculating goodness. In these alone we do more than others, and are entitled to a "reward."

This idea, then, has its place in the teaching of Jesus because it was familiar to his hearers, and conveyed his meaning to them in a manner they could understand. At the same time he recognized that it had a genuine moral value. When all is said we cannot, in a world that is ruled by purpose and links an effect with every cause, escape from the conception of reward. Action by which nothing is gained is futile. Even goodness that achieved no end beyond itself would be meaningless, and you cannot require of men that they should practise it. This is frankly acknowledged by Jesus. With his strong sense of reality he will have nothing to do with the sentimental ethic which assumes that goodness, the one vital thing in the world, should be satisfied although it leads to no result. But while he dwells on the reward attached to righteousness he tries to lift us to a nobler understanding of what it consists in. It is not anything that can be measured in terms of material well-being; and those who aim at reward of this kind have their full

[12] Mt. 5: 46.

payment in the present age.[13] Men are to set their hearts wholly on the Kingdom. By doing the will of God they will attain to that higher and larger life which will grow into eternal life hereafter. So when Jesus speaks of the reward which his disciples are to keep before them as the goal of their service, what he has in mind is the fulfilment of their own true being. They are God's children, and their life achieves its purpose according as they grow like Him in mind and will.

[13] Mt. 6:2, 5, 16.

CHAPTER IX

TRUST IN GOD'S PROVIDENCE

THE obedience to God in which Jesus finds the spring of moral action is inseparable from trust in God. In order to do His will with our whole heart we need the assurance that He is over us,—upholding and directing us and giving us all things good. This conception of God's providence belongs to the very substance of Jesus' religion, but it is no less essential to his ethic. He requires us to face the perplexities of life in the confidence that God is with us. He forbids us to plan for the future since it will be ordered by God, and our duty is to obey His will in the moment that is ours. It is evident that the moral life on all its sides must be profoundly affected by this attitude of trust in God.

Nothing in the teaching of Jesus has so often been called in question as this conception of providence. His ethic, it is held, involves a fatalism, a passive submission to circumstance instead of valiant effort to conquer it. It places a ban on the forethought and resolution which are necessary elements in any moral life which is worth acquiring. From another point of view the attitude of Jesus has been criticized, as due to the historical limitations under which he worked. He was an Oriental, disposed to the acceptance of burdens which make the Western man impatient. He was the child of a simple civilization, and his lot was cast in a land and climate where the needs of life were few. It was easy to tell Galilean peasants that they

should have done with anxiety, and look to God for food and raiment like the birds of the air; but for modern men counsel of this kind is mere folly. Life as we know it in our great industrial cities must always be a struggle. We have to plan far ahead and make the utmost use of our own will and intelligence, instead of resting in the faith that everything will be provided for us by God.

It is unnecessary for our present purpose to discuss the larger questions involved in these criticisms. They start from the assumption that the teaching of Jesus is in error because it is at odds with modern conditions; but there is always the possibility that the modern conditions are wrong. Can we be sure that these complex artificial arrangements which compel us to be ever scheming for the future are the most favorable to the true purposes of life? May it not be that we have wandered off the right track, and that the East has in some respects been wiser than the West? There are not a few thinkers in our time who are willing to acknowledge that this may be so. They believe that our civilization needs to be simplified in such a manner as to make the teaching of Jesus more fully practicable.

But in any case the criticisms directed against this side of Jesus' thought are apt to neglect or misconstrue some essential facts. (1) For one thing, he does not forbid the exercise of prudence and foresight. Some of his most striking parables (*e. g.*, the Talents, the Ten Virgins, the Unjust Steward) turn on the very point that it is foolish to make no provision for the future. It may indeed be claimed that the whole burden of his message is that men should look to the future, judging the worth of the present in the light of the Kingdom which is to come. What he condemns is not prudence, but the prudence which occupies itself wholly with the small contingencies of the mere

earthly life. These, he declares, may be safely disregarded. His followers must learn to study the larger prudence, which alone is worthy of their high destinies. They are to look beyond the petty interests of tomorrow to the final and enduring issues, and make sure that for these at least they have provided.

(2) Again, his warnings are directed not against reasonable care for the future but against anxiety. He recognizes that the future is ordered by a power outside of us, and that all efforts to shape it according to our own wish are vain, and can only vex and disappoint us. He perceives, too, that such anxiety does not help but distracts and weakens. "Sufficient to the day is the evil thereof." [1] Our wisdom is to concentrate on the present duty, and by doing it with all our might we shall be better prepared to meet the future, whatever it may bring.

(3) It must never be forgotten that when Jesus forbids anxiety about the future he addresses himself to his followers, who have taken the will of God as their sole law. His words are too often regarded as a general counsel; and it is easy to show that for most men they are a direct encouragement to thriftlessness and folly. But the thought is always that if you are striving honestly to obey God, then you may safely leave all issues in His hand. The world, as Jesus understood it, is not at the mercy of chance, but is wisely ordered according to laws which may be trusted in the end to fulfil their purpose. If your action from hour to hour is in harmony with those laws you need have no fear about the future. The governing forces of the world are on your side, and sooner or later you will be justified. This conviction may never be expressed in so many words, but it lies at the heart of those sayings in which Jesus assures his people that they need take no thought for the morrow.

[1] Mt. 6: 34.

(4) In this, as in almost all his demands, we must allow for his practice of sharply defining a truth by stating it in an extreme and even paradoxical form. It cannot be denied that if his words were taken literally they would lead to dangerous consequences. They might be construed to mean that God, who feeds the ravens, will also feed His children, and that all labor on their part is therefore superfluous. That this was not Jesus' meaning does not require to be proved. He himself provided for his living by honest work. He takes for granted, in numerous sayings and parables, that labor is not only necessary for sustaining life, but is a moral discipline which nothing else can replace. When he declares that food and raiment and all things needful to the earthly life will be freely given by God to those who trust Him, he only affirms, in a manner there can be no mistaking, his confidence in the goodness of God. No doubt if he had wished to state his thought exactly he would have said that God provides for men through the wealth stored up in nature, which they can draw upon by their own skill and energy. This is implied in the many parables that deal with sowing and reaping and fishing and merchandise. But his aim is simply to make clear the fact of God's unfailing providence, and he deliberately leaves the means out of sight. God sustains men, just as He does the sparrows and the grass of the field.

It is impossible to judge rightly of Jesus' moral teaching unless we keep in mind this attitude of trust in God which it always pre-supposes. This, indeed, may be singled out as the distinguishing mark of the Gospel morality. The pagan ethical systems, from Aristotle onward, assumed that the world we live in is hostile or indifferent. Our task is to cultivate qualities by which we may be able to circumvent or overcome the opposing forces. Modern ethical teach-

ing is determined, in great measure, by the same outlook. It starts from the conception of a struggle for existence. Placed as we are in the midst of powers which are ever ready to destroy us we have to match our will against them and compel them, in spite of themselves, to further our higher life. For Jesus the world, with all its dangers and accidents, is overruled by God, who is ever mindful of His people and is waiting to help them. Our part is to discern the sovereign will at work and reconcile ourselves to its behests. If we do so we shall find that the things which seemed most contrary are on our side, and are offered by God as means to our welfare. It is this trust in God which makes the moral task, as Jesus conceives it, one of freedom and joy. Morality for most men carries with it the idea of a painful discipline, salutary in the end, but imposed on us meanwhile against our will. But in the mind of Jesus there is always the thought of a divine power working along with us. The world is not an enemy that we must be afraid of and can only hope to master by the exercise of our own strength and cunning. It is God's world, and while obeying Him we can have the confidence that all things will work together for our good.

CHAPTER X

NON-RESISTANCE

THE characteristic note in the teaching of Jesus has sometimes been discovered in his commandment "resist not evil." In the history of the early persecutions we have abundant proof that the passive acceptance of suffering was generally regarded as a Christian duty. The Quakers in modern times have always taken their stand on the principle that evil must not be actively resisted. Tolstoi has fixed on this requirement as the guiding rule of the Christian morality, and has deduced from it that war, criminal procedure, all the mechanism of the modern state, are forbidden. They belong to the old order of life, which was definitely superseded by Jesus.

To make this, however, the fundamental principle of the teaching is plainly unwarranted. It is explicitly laid down only in the one passage, Matt. 5:38*f*. Other sayings (*e. g.*, "he that taketh the sword shall perish by the sword") [1] are doubtless in accord with it, and it finds illustration in Jesus' submission to injury at the Samaritan village,[2] in his refusal to defend himself when arrested, in his silence before his accusers at the Trial. But against sayings and incidents of this kind we must set others of a quite opposite tenor. In a number of parables the punishment of evil-doers is noted with manifest approval. On one occasion Jesus himself is described as exercising violence towards the

[1] Mt. 26: 52.
[2] Lk. 9: 52*f*.

traffickers who had profaned the Temple. Again and again he fiercely denounces oppressors and hypocrites; and one who could so speak would not hold back on a just occasion from corresponding deeds. His attitude was never that of a passive toleration of wrong.

Moreover, when his rule of non-resistance is itself examined more closely it does not bear the large interpretation which has sometimes been placed on it. The context plainly shows that what he forbade was retaliation. "Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I say unto you that ye resist not evil, but whosoever shall smite thee on the cheek, turn to him the other also." In other words, when wrong is done to your own person do not answer it with a similar wrong; endure the evil done to you and overcome it with good. It is not said that you must stand by when you see wrong inflicted on others, or that force must not be used in the necessary maintenance of law.

The rule laid down by Jesus has, for that part, been now incorporated in the custom of all civilized nations. It is recognized that however grievously a man has been injured he must not retaliate for himself. The world has gradually discovered that when once the right of private revenge is granted the door is thrown open to all kinds of evil and injustice. Nothing in the teaching of Jesus has been so often ridiculed as his precept of non-resistance; yet all experience has proved its wisdom. So far from deriding it as a wild paradox one might almost believe that Jesus had arrived at it by the path of sober reflection. He had observed as one of the plain facts of life that revenge defeats its own end, and that evil is often best remedied by leaving it alone. In a previous passage of this same chapter (Mt. 5:25, 26, *cf.* Lk. 12:57) he counsels his disciples to compromise with an adversary instead of entering on a law-suit which will make

matters worse. If the passage is not to be taken as a parable, the meaning of which is now lost, it reads like a fragment of practical wisdom; and it may be that in the course of his teaching Jesus sometimes threw out these homely prudential maxims. There is at least the possibility that the counsel not to meet evil with evil should be taken as one of them.

It is personal retaliation, then, and not the use of force in general that is contemplated in the passage. The principle which Jesus enounces may perhaps be applied, as many Christian thinkers would now apply it, to the quarrels of classes and nations; but he does not himself make this wider reference. He confines himself to the case of the individual. When a man has suffered injury he is not only to refrain from paying it back, but to answer it by some positive benefit. This addition has seemed to many to crown the absurdity of the whole precept; but, rightly considered, it is the saving clause which makes it fully practicable. To submit to insults and injuries must always be the mark of the time-server or coward, and is repugnant to all healthy human instincts. But Jesus makes it clear that the submission which he enjoins is not that of weakness or calculation or servility. He requires that while enduring a wrong a man should assert his personal honor and freedom by giving something more than that which is unjustly taken from him. By so doing he makes himself superior to his adversary. He transforms into his own free act what would otherwise be an indignity forced upon him.

The rule of non-resistance cannot be taken as the central principle in Jesus' teaching, and may possibly be explained as little more than a prudential maxim. Nevertheless it connects itself in the closest manner with several of his fundamental ideas.

(1) It brings to the sharpest point his demand for

human kindness. "Love your enemies; bless them that curse you; do good to them that hate you." [3] Your fellow-man has at all times a claim upon you. Even when he is in the act of doing you an injury, you have no right to injure him in return. He has forgotten his duty to *you,* but this does not absolve you from your own duty of showing love to your neighbor.

(2) It expresses the judgment of Jesus on the futility of evil. He perceives that a wrong is not cancelled by avenging it, but has only been enlarged and perpetuated. There are now two wrongs instead of one, and they will continue to multiply without end. It is more than probable that the words "Resist not evil" [4] (τῳ πονηρῳ) ought to read "Resist not the evil one"; and if so taken they acquire an emphatic meaning. Elsewhere to the charge that he casts out devils by Beelzebub Jesus answers, "how can Satan cast out Satan?" It is certain, that is, that the powers of evil are all leagued together, and that Satan will never do anything to injure his own cause. The same idea is implied here; and it may be that a play on words was contained in the saying as originally spoken. "Satan" means literally "the Adversary," "the Resister"; and Jesus would thus say "do not oppose the devil with his own weapons." By so doing you do not defeat him, but only accept his law and make him stronger.

(3) In this saying Jesus proclaims his confidence in the power of goodness. He believed that nothing but goodness will in the end prove itself real, and that we are safe at all times to rely on it. To use it towards an enemy is not to yield to him weakly, but to conquer him by a force superior to his own. This is the true answer to the criticism so often urged against

[3] Mt. 5: 44; Lk. 6: 28.
[4] Mk. 3: 23, *cf.* Mt. 12: 26; Lk. 11: 18.

the Christian teaching that it counsels submission instead of brave resistance. Celsus in the early days has nothing but contempt for the Christians, who accept all injuries meekly. Nietzsche for the same reason has branded the Christian ethic as a "slave morality." It has to be granted that such mockery would be justified if Jesus had merely taught, in negative fashion, that resistance is not permissible on the part of his disciples. The power and will to resist must always be the measure of manhood and of life itself. And what Jesus demands is not non-resistance but a different kind of resistance. Evil is not to be opposed with its own arms but with good, for in this manner alone can it be finally overcome. Sometimes the method of Jesus has been defined as passive resistance; and this, as we have learned from modern instances, is a real power, which can be exerted on occasion with terrible effect. But the theory of passive resistance misses the whole point of Jesus' teaching. For one thing, it involves the motive of hate, which is the very thing he condemns. One might almost infer from some expositions of the Sermon on the Mount, that Jesus objected to violence because it causes physical pain, and is foolish and unnecessary, since we can harm our enemies just as much without hurting their bodies. Surely a strange reading of the thought of Jesus, for whom the wrong even of murder consisted wholly in the inward motive. But passive resistance is contrary to his teaching not only because it retains the false motive but because it is merely passive. His whole purpose is to impress on us that goodness is an active power. We are to overcome not by standing still but by throwing ourselves boldly on the side of those forces which will eventually prove the strongest. Non-resistance of evil has no meaning apart from this positive faith in the ultimate victory of good.

CHAPTER XI

THE POLITICAL ATTITUDE OF JESUS

THERE came a time when Christianity ceased to be confined to an obscure sect, and was made the religion of an Empire. It then became necessary to discover how Jesus had conceived of national and civic obligations, and this aspect of his thought has ever since been the subject of controversy. The various monarchical systems of the past fifteen hundred years have all tried to base themselves on the authority of Jesus, while in our days he is put forward as the pioneer of democracy or of some type of socialism. That he contemplated a new political order is generally taken for granted, and opinions only differ as to the precise nature of his plan.

When we turn to the Gospels, however, it is difficult to find anything that can be construed in a political sense. The one saying in which Jesus touches directly on the prerogative of the state is his famous answer about the tribute-money: "Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and unto God the things that are God's." [1] Many interpretations have been given to this answer. It has been taken sometimes as a strong assertion of the divine right of kings, sometimes as a denial that the state has any but a secondary claim. The truth is that the answer was purposely non-committal. An attempt was made in the critical days at Jerusalem to force Jesus into a position that would compromise him either with the Jewish people

[1] Mk. 12: 17; Mt. 22: 21; Lk. 20: 25.

or with the Roman administration. He avoided the snare, while at the same time he lifted the whole issue to a higher plane. It has been objected that the answer was a vague and sophistical one,—intended merely to evade a question of far-reaching importance which happened at the time to be dangerous. But a criticism like this misses the true point of the incident. Before he answered them Jesus asked his questioners to show him a penny,—thereby surprising them into an admission that at that very moment they were carrying Cæsar's money. They were availing themselves of all the services of the existing government, while they professed these conscientious doubts of its lawfulness. To this extent the answer of Jesus is clear and sufficient, and has a definite bearing on civic duty. So long as men are willing to receive from Cæsar they must consent to give him in return. They have no right to enjoy the benefits of an ordered state, and refuse all obligation to conform to its laws. The political issue as Jesus handles it becomes a moral one on which there can be no dubiety. When you contract a debt you are bound to honor it, and from this point of view your duty to Cæsar is no less sacred than your duty to God. But on the question whether the debt should be contracted, whether a government should exist and what should be its nature, he has nothing to say.

How is this silence of Jesus on the larger social relations to be accounted for? It cannot be supposed that he deemed the controversy about them unimportant, or that it lay outside of his field of vision. That incident of the tribute-money is itself evidence that it was intensely real for every one in Palestine at that time. The movement was already on foot which was to culminate a generation later in the great revolt, and in that movement the fate of Jesus himself was involved. If there was any question on which he might have

been expected to declare his mind fully it was this one of obedience to the state. It was vital to himself, and his hearers were all directly concerned in it, and yet he was content to leave it entirely to one side.

His silence may partly be explained by the very acuteness of the political issue in his time. Any pronouncement he might have made would certainly have been understood in a partisan sense. He would have found himself branded as an enemy of his people, or else have been acclaimed as a national deliverer and hurried into a false course. In any case, attention would have been diverted from his religious message, and he would probably have been suppressed as a revolutionary before a chance was given him of fully announcing it. There can be little doubt that one of the chief difficulties under which he labored was that of pursuing his mission in a time of political crisis. Fears of a popular rising had brought about the imprisonment and death of John the Baptist.[2] Jesus' own claim to be Messiah, as soon as it was suspected, was construed in a political sense and he was condemned. That he was left free so long, and was permitted to follow his own chosen path, was due to nothing else than his studied avoidance of those debates which were agitating the minds of the people. It has been suggested that our evangelists, writing at a time when the church was exposed to danger from the side of the state, have omitted many of Jesus' utterances, and made his gospel politically harmless. But the truth almost certainly is that there was nothing to omit. His deliberate aim was to keep clear of the stormy politics of the age; and if he had acted otherwise his message would have been wholly lost to us.

There was another reason, however, for his silence on the vexed questions concerning man's duty towards

[2] *Cf.* the account in Josephus, *Antiq.* xviii. 5. 2.

the state. He came forward as the herald of the Kingdom of God, which he believed to be near at hand. In that coming age a new order was to be established. All existing institutions were to come to an end or be remodeled; and this change was to result wholly from the act of God. It was therefore needless to interfere with the arrangements of the present order. Faulty as they might be they were shortly to be superseded, and the true wisdom was to make the best of things as they were. Instead of wasting themselves on political turmoil men ought to set their hearts with a new resolve on the Kingdom of God. By repentance and a life in harmony with His will they might prevail on God to hasten the Kingdom, and then the conditions which they found so burdensome would at once be righted. When we keep in mind this expectation which was so real to him, much that at first sight is puzzling in Jesus' attitude can be explained. He was not indifferent to the questions that were moving the nation, neither did he hold his peace out of mere considerations of prudence. But he refrained from intermeddling with issues which would presently be laid to rest by God Himself through the inauguration of His Kingdom.

In his own behavior Jesus was duly observant of all civic laws and ordinances. At the trial it was found impossible to produce any real evidence against him as a disturber of public order, and for this reason Pilate was inclined to set him free. Throughout his teaching he assumes that men ought to submit to constituted authority and discharge the obligations laid on them by the state. Many of his parables turn on the relations of king and subject, master and servant; and it is significant that he is always on the side of loyalty, and thinks of rebellion as a crime which must be punished. Whenever he makes reference to mili-

tary discipline, courts of justice, functions of rulers, he acknowledges the rights of authority as a matter of course. He never condemns government as such, but only the injustices committed in its name. At the same time it is never suggested that ordinary citizens should regard their service to the state as a real part of their religious service. Duty to Cæsar is one thing, duty to God is quite another. We have now come to recognize that not the least important of man's religious obligations is to interest himself in public affairs and see that they are conducted righteously. This sentiment was even stronger in the city-states of Greece, and for that part in Israel at the time of the prophets. Jesus has nothing to say on this matter of civic duty. He lived, we must remember, in a subject country, whose people had no active share in the direction of affairs. The one obligation laid on them was to observe the laws, which they had no part in making or enforcing. Jesus bids them render this obedience, since life in a community is impossible without law. Yet he is content that it should be a passive obedience. Men are to submit to the state, acknowledging that in the present age it performs a necessary and beneficent service. They are to submit to it even when it seems to be tyrannous and unjust, for at the worst it will shortly disappear and give place to the Kingdom of God. But while they thus acquiesce in the existing order they are to think of themselves even now as citizens of the coming Kingdom.[3]

It must be admitted, therefore, that we can obtain little direct guidance from the teaching of Jesus on those problems of government and citizenship which are of such vital moment to the world of our day. His reticence can be largely explained from the conditions

[3] This is the attitude reflected in the incident of the Temple-tax, *cf.* Mt. 17: 24-27.

under which he worked and the apocalyptic ideas which determined the form of his message. Yet it may be doubted whether he would have been much more explicit even though he had been perfectly free to make a definite pronouncement. His concern is always with the inward principles of man's life, not with the framework. He demanded that on the larger as on the narrower scale men must act justly and mercifully, and respect the worth of each individual soul; but he never tried to prescribe the manner in which this demand should be realized. Men must here decide for themselves, in view of the special contingencies which they have to reckon with from time to time. It was never the design of Jesus to reorganize the world's life according to a set scheme which should be complete in all its details and incapable of any change. He aimed at creating in men the new will, in virtue of which they would be able henceforth to make their own laws.

It cannot be wondered at that in the ceaseless debate as to the true political order, with all its momentous issues for human progress and happiness, the world has constantly turned to Jesus for some clear word of decision. If he set himself to promote brotherhood among men, ought he not to have marked out, in unmistakable fashion, the lines on which a harmonious society might be framed? We cannot but admit, however, that if he had tried to do so his teaching would long ago have been emptied of value. It would have had relevance only to the time in which he lived, and in a later age, when conditions were entirely different, it would have cramped all natural growth and wrought nothing but mischief. Even as it was, the progress of the world was held back for centuries because all institutions were supposed to rest on the divine sanction of Jesus, and to be therefore unchangeable. It was the strength of his teaching that he drew up no program, but only insisted on great principles

and ideals, which could be worked out in many different ways. No generation can exempt itself from the labor of discovering for itself how they can best be applied to its own conditions and needs. Jesus perceived, and surely in this we can acknowledge his broad wisdom, that the higher life of man is not bound up with some one form of social organization. It can realize itself most fully now under one system, now under another, and each one of them is right for its own day, and sooner or later is outgrown. There could be no greater disaster than to identify Christianity, as some would do, with a political theory which happens to attract us for the time, and will finally go the way of every other. It is indeed one of the first of Christian duties to build up a social order in which the demands of Jesus will be more capable of fulfilment, but he has prescribed for us no definite plan which we must follow. His one concern was with the great moral and spiritual interests, and the organization which he approves is that which will secure them best, under the given requirements of our own land and time.

CHAPTER XII

MAN'S DUTY TO HIS NEIGHBOR

JESUS has little to say on the wider obligations to the state or to society at large. The duties of which he speaks, almost exclusively, are those which we owe to our immediate neighbors,—superiors and dependents, friends and enemies, the poor and sick and unfortunate with whom we come into personal contact. This definite note in his teaching is highly significant, and points the difference between his gospel and that modern enthusiasm for humanity which has often been confounded with it. Jesus does not think in terms of masses but in terms of the individual. His primary interest is not that of making the world better, for this will be accomplished by God Himself when He brings in the Kingdom, but that of fostering an active goodness in men and women. The opportunity is given us, in our human relations, of acting as God Himself does, and of thus becoming His children.

At the same time by insisting on our duty to those around us Jesus seeks to break down the selfish isolation in which men are wont to live. His chief complaint of the Pharisees is that they cared only for their own standing in the eyes of God. They aimed at attaining to the highest moral excellence, and to that extent were worthy of all praise, but did not see that they were defeating their own end. For a man's life is interwoven with the lives around him; his neighbor's good is his own good. By the help he offers to

those who need him he himself enters into a closer fellowship with God.

It follows that the motive which Jesus always puts forward in his demand for brotherly kindness is that of compassion. Men are to help each other not from any calculation, or even from a sense of duty, but out of pure sympathy with their fellow-men. Jesus himself in his works of healing seems to have acted invariably from this motive of compassion. He was anxious to avoid the reputation of a miracle-worker, which led men to view him in a false light and to forget his real mission. Again and again his miracles were wrought reluctantly, and with an injunction that no man should be told. Yet he continued to exert his powers of healing because the sufferings of other men touched him as if they were his own.

The parable of the Good Samaritan was spoken in answer to the question "who is my neighbor?" Luke has perhaps missed the point of the answer, for at the close of the parable he makes Jesus ask, "who then was neighbor to him who fell among thieves?" [1] Or it may be that Jesus himself gave a different turn to the question put to him, and declared that instead of considering who our neighbor may be we should study at all times and to all people to show ourselves neighborly. But however we take the parable it embodies Jesus' criticism of the common Jewish attitude in his day. It was assumed that humane obligations were strictly limited. A Jew owed no duty to a Gentile; a religious Jew must think of his own associates and not of strangers and outcasts. The Law, to be sure, enjoined love to one's neighbor,—but "who is my neighbor?" This was a question warmly discussed in the Rabbinical schools, and it was answered, as time went on, in an ever narrower way. Jesus tells his parable in order to show that no restrictions can be

[1] Lk. 10: 36.

drawn. Any one who is plainly in need of your help is by that fact your neighbor. His trouble gives him a claim upon you which you are not at liberty to disown. Your help must be rendered spontaneously, without any enquiries as to who he is and whether he deserves your pity. Jesus allows no narrowing or qualification. Not only those who stand apart from us in race or class or religion, but even our enemies are to be counted as "neighbors."

What, then, are the duties which a man owes to his neighbor? They are summed up in the Golden Rule, "whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye to them likewise." Every good that we desire for ourselves we must try to secure for others. Their distress, of whatever kind it be, must unite us to them more closely than to our own acquaintances. "When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends nor thy brethren nor thy kinsfolk, nor thy rich neighbors; but when thou makest a feast call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind." [2]

The emphasis is all thrown on this duty of kindness which we owe to others, and little is said of justice. It is indeed assumed in various parables that wicked servants must be punished, that men who act fraudulently or slothfully must take the consequences. But the motive of justice undoubtedly tends to fall into the background; and this has always been felt to be one of the chief difficulties in the Christian ethic. From the outset the church was troubled with parasites,—often worthless characters or rank impostors, whom in obedience to Jesus it deemed itself obliged to tolerate. In all times since the law of Christian kindness has been hard to reconcile with that of ordinary justice. For its own protection, and even in the higher interests of its erring members, society must restrain and punish; but in so doing it has seemed to

[2] Lk. 14: 13.

transgress the plain command of Jesus. His attitude is doubtless to be explained in large measure from his profound sense that justice is the prerogative of God. "Judge not that ye be not judged." [3] "How wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pluck out the mote out of thine eye, and behold there is a beam in thine own eye." [4] No man is qualified to sit in judgment on his neighbor. He has failings of his own which make all fault-finding presumptuous, and which dull and pervert his vision. In any case, no man, however upright and well-meaning, can understand the mind of another, and make due allowance for all the motives that have determined his action. We must leave justice to God, who knows all things, and be content with the exercise of kindness, which is in our own power. There can be no question that in the final issue this position of Jesus is unanswerable. Indiscriminate kindness may be blamed for many evils, but infinitely more harm has been wrought by man's blundering efforts to do justice. It might fairly be argued that the world would be happier if we had faith to act literally on the teaching of Jesus, and leave all justice to God. At the same time what he requires is not merely an undistinguishing kindness. Although he forbids men to take on themselves the office of judging and punishing, he does not fail to acknowledge that a certain reserve is necessary. We need to know whom we are dealing with, and shape our action accordingly. In this manner we can best understand the difficult saying, "Give not that which is holy to the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine." [5] To many the injunction has seemed so contrary to the spirit of Jesus that they have denied its authenticity, or given it some vague, metaphorical meaning; but this is gra-

[3] Mt. 7:1.
[4] Mt. 7:4, 5.
[5] Mt. 7:6.

tuitous. The words, taken as they stand, imply that while men must bear with one another to the uttermost they have still the right to discriminate, and need not wear their heart on their sleeve. In the life of Jesus himself nothing is more remarkable than the practical wisdom with which he steered his way amidst the snares spread for him. "He knew what was in man." [6] He perceived who were his enemies, and was careful to afford them no handle for their malice. He calculated the drift of dangerous questions, and returned guarded answers. When he sent forth his disciples on their mission his warning was, "Be ye wise as serpents and harmless as doves." [7] What he desired was not an indolent good-nature, willing to be imposed on by anybody, but a royal generosity. You are not to shut your eyes to evil, and pretend to yourself that all men are acting from pure motives. But while seeing things as they are you are to persist in doing good, because this is the law of your own nature. Jesus insists continually that our duty to our fellowmen has nothing to do with their deserving, or with the return they make to us. "Do good and lend, hoping for nothing again." "Be kind to the unthankful and evil." [8] You are to measure your benefits not by the conduct of others, but by the self-forgetting goodness that wells up in your own heart.

This comes out most plainly in the demand for the forgiving spirit, on which the whole teaching on duty to one's neighbor may be said to hinge. It is significant that the only social obligation which is touched on in the Lord's prayer is this one of forgiveness. Jesus is aware that the one great hindrance to right action in our dealings with other men is the unwillingness to overlook injuries. We allow ourselves to be

[6] Jn. 2: 25.
[7] Mt. 10: 16.
[8] Lk. 6: 35.

guided by their behavior towards ourselves, and are thus restrained from the good we are disposed to do. Without the forgiving spirit we can enter into no true relation to our fellow-men, or with God Himself. He does not withhold his gifts because of human ingratitude but bestows them freely on all, and when we forgive our brethren our will is in harmony with the will of God. Sometimes it might appear as if Jesus allowed a place for a certain element of calculation. He dwells repeatedly on the thought that we must forgive in order to be forgiven. God's mercy to us is conditional on the mercy we show to others, and knowing this we must be ready to forgive men their trespasses. "With what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again." [9] But the form in which Jesus expresses his thought need not mislead us as to its inward meaning. Forgiveness, he says, is the great attribute of God, and just in proportion as we share it we prove ourselves to be His children. His judgment of us, his recognition that we have attained to the true life, will depend on our moral likeness to Himself; and this is tested by our capacity to forgive.

[9] Mk. 4: 24; Mt. 7: 2; Lk. 6: 38.

CHAPTER XIII

POSSESSIONS

NOT a few of Jesus' best-known sayings are on the subject of wealth, and on this ground it has often been held that he aimed at an economic change. A man of the people, he was indignant at the injustice which had gathered all capital into the hands of a few, and was bent on a more equitable distribution. This theory is widely current at the present day, but is by no means new. Again and again in the course of Christian history there have been popular outbreaks against the wealth-holding classes in which appeal was made to the plain words of Jesus. In the deeper sense this appeal has been a legitimate one, for social justice belongs to the very essence of his demand. But the fantastic projects which have often been based on his teaching were entirely foreign to him. It would not be difficult to show that the motive which underlies his sayings on wealth is directly opposite to that of the modern agitator, who assumes that wealth is the chief good, and that all men therefore should possess it equally. Jesus regards it as the great hindrance in our quest of higher things. The rich man can hardly enter into the Kingdom of God, while the poor and hungry and unfortunate are pronounced blessed. If these sayings of Jesus are to be taken literally they require a state of society in which all are poor,—not the socialistic Paradise in which poverty has ceased to exist.

But are we to discover the real thought of Jesus in those passages where wealth is denounced as intrin-

sically wrong? Reference has been made already to the limitations imposed on him by those apocalyptic ideas which affect the outward form if not the substance of his gospel. Believing as he did that the new age was just at hand, he called on men to break with the present world. Not only must they undergo an inward change, conforming their will to that will of God which will hereafter prevail, but they must rid themselves of earthly possessions. These will count for nothing in the new age, and the man who is wholly wrapt up in them cannot even desire its coming. Most of the sayings in which Jesus denounces riches and rich men have to be read in view of these apocalyptic ideas. He is not concerned with the right or wrong of holding property. His thought is merely that in this hour of supreme crises, when the present order is about to be changed, the earthly things must cease to hamper us; and underneath the apocalyptic forms we can discern a great meaning. It is always true that devotion to material goods is fatal to the higher life. It is true also that for each individual man the end of this world is now at hand, and that the heaping up of wealth is labor wasted. The parable of the Rich Fool can never lose its significance. But we have to recognize frankly that the Gospel sayings on the evil of wealth, in so far as they presuppose apocalyptic ideas, are not of permanent validity. They were meant for a definite situation, altogether unique, and are not to be generalized as rules for the Christian life.

It is further to be observed that Luke, to whom we owe most of the recorded sayings on the subject of wealth, is strongly biased. Alike in his Gospel and in the book of Acts he takes frequent occasion to extol poverty as a Christian virtue, and his own prejudices would seem to have colored his account of Jesus' teaching. The reason for his attitude can only be conjectured. Perhaps he is influenced by the fact that

the early church, for which he wrote, was mainly recruited from the poorer classes. To a far greater extent his point of view is determined by his own individual temper. He was plainly a man of tender and generous sentiment, who in his warm sympathy for the poor had come to idealize poverty. It need not be doubted that the sayings which he attributes to Jesus are genuine; but he is at pains to put this side of the teaching into the forefront and gives it at times a wrong emphasis. That he does so in the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus can hardly be questioned. The original meaning of the parable may have been little more than that earthly positions will be reversed in the coming age. But the rich man's fate is so presented that he seems to be punished simply because he is rich, while Lazarus is rewarded for his poverty.[1] This false and puerile lesson cannot be that which Jesus intended.

It was inevitable that in his judgments on earthly possessions Jesus should be influenced by his belief in the imminence of the Kingdom. We have seen, however, that he never allows himself to be warped from his own convictions by apocalyptic ideas. Again and again he breaks away from them altogether, and considers the principles of the new righteousness as they bear on the normal conditions of life. It is in such sayings that we must look for his real estimate of the value of material things. When he says, for instance, "A man's life consists not in the abundance of the things which he possesses," [2] he is not thinking of the coming age, when the treasures of this world will become worthless. He reminds us that even now we must learn to distinguish between that which is accidental and that which is essential. The danger of

[1] Lk. 16: 25.
[2] Lk. 12: 15.

wealth is always that it distracts a man from those spiritual interests which belong to his true personality. He confuses what he *has* with what he *is*, and is thus tempted to give a false direction to his life. In like manner the thought is constantly present to Jesus that earthly things are the chief obstacle to a living trust in God. We place our reliance on them, forgetting that they are unreal and may slip away from us at any moment, and so lose our hold on God. Apart from any thought of the coming age we must accustom ourselves to sit loose to mere possessions. The life is more than meat and the body than raiment. It profits a man nothing to gain the world and lose his soul.

The real interest of Jesus, therefore, is to ensure that the spiritual things are put first. He has no feeling against wealth on ascetic grounds, and much less does he denounce it from any class prejudice. The earthly things, he is never tired of repeating, are God's gifts to His children, and must be accepted with gratitude. To possess them in abundance cannot in itself be wrong. Not only does he pass no condemnation on wealth but he values it as one of the means provided by God for the discipline and development of the moral life. It is not a little significant that a large part of his teaching is occupied with nothing else than the right use of money. Unlike many religious teachers who have affected a disdainful attitude to the merely material interests he recognizes that for ordinary men life must largely revolve around problems of money, and he faces the fact honestly. This element of his teaching is particularly marked in the parables, where he reveals his attitude to life more freely and unconsciously than in his more formal utterances. Again and again he points out that wealth affords men the opportunity of showing kindness towards their neighbors. He shows that by the use they make of it they are tested, and are enabled to

train themselves in all higher virtues. "He that is faithful in little is faithful also in much." [3] "Make for yourselves friends by means of the unrighteous mammon." [4] This profound saying perhaps expresses more fully than any other the real thought of Jesus on the subject of wealth. It is "unrighteous mammon" in so far as it belongs to an order of things in which evil prevails and which will erelong give place to a higher one. None the less by making wise use of it we may gain for ourselves something that will satisfy and will endure. Material treasure may be so expended on the greater ends of life that it will be restored to us in the Kingdom as spiritual treasure.

It is by the light of such sayings that we must seek guidance from Jesus on the urgent difficulties of our time, and not by emphasis on that side of his teaching which was conditioned by the apocalyptic hope. He never intended to formulate an economic theory, and if he had done so, in a world so different from ours, it would now be completely out of date. Here, as everywhere else, he was content to indicate the guiding principles which must remain valid amidst all outward changes. He declared, for one thing, that wealth has always to be used as an instrument towards higher ends. It must not be exalted into an end in itself, or turned to purposes of display and self-indulgence. When it dulls our sense of the true meaning of life, or obscures our trust in God, it becomes harmful. But Jesus does not condemn it for its own sake. His one anxiety is that whether they are rich or poor men should hold themselves free to serve their true Master. Again, he requires that in our use of earthly possessions we should be governed by the supreme motive of love to our neighbor. It is true that he does not deal directly with those questions of social justice which

[3] Lk. 16: 10, 11.
[4] Lk. 16: 9.

now perplex us, and certainly he takes no side in our modern economic quarrels. Yet he demands that in the employment of wealth the rights and needs of others have always to be considered. Each man is a personal being, accountable to God, and the gifts of God are to be so distributed that a free personal life is made possible for all men alike. This is undoubtedly a plain corollary from Jesus' teaching, and cannot be pressed too strongly. Yet he refrains from suggesting any plan by which the ideal of economic justice may be realized. He does not condemn any system as wrong, and would doubtless have acknowledged that under all systems men can look first to the great requirements of mercy and brotherhood. It is for ourselves to discover from time to time how the changing conditions of the world must affect the sharing of possessions, and Jesus has no set program to offer. He only demands that in this, as in all else, we should strive to carry into action the fundamental principles of his gospel.

CHAPTER XIV

THE FAMILY

THE Jewish people in the time of Christ were honorably distinguished for the purity of their family life. Probably among no other race were the domestic relations so close, and on the whole so happy; and the chief credit for this was undoubtedly due to the Law. It had originated in a time when society was organized by families and groups of families, and had insured the preservation, to a great extent, of this ancient order. As the family continued to be the social unit, so it was the religious one. The father of the household had something of the character of a priest, and made himself responsible for the spiritual training and welfare of its members. This recognition of the family as a religious organism, a miniature of the larger Israel, enhanced the reverence that was attached to it by all pious Jews.

Jesus accepted the view of the family which obtained among his countrymen. He took for granted that the institution as he knew it was ordained by God, and rebuked the casuistry by which its obligations were sometimes evaded under color of religion. His teaching is full of tender allusions to parents and children, and to the natural affections which are cultivated in the home. His conception of God in His relation to men is determined by what he knows of earthly fatherhood. When he speaks of that higher bond by which men will be united in the Kingdom, he describes it as one that makes all men brothers. By

thus associating the family with his central religious ideas he gave it a new consecration. From the time of the primitive church onward the Christian family has been one of the glories of our religion, and may justly be regarded as the creation of Jesus.

At the same time he appears, in several directions, to qualify the current estimate of the family. In the excessive reverence which was commonly paid to it he sees a danger to the higher religious interests, and is anxious, while maintaining all that is beautiful and helpful in it, to keep it in a subordinate place. (1) For one thing, he desires us to think of it as one of the institutions which belong to the present age. It is necessary for the right ordering of life under the existing conditions that there should be these groups, marked off from each other; but in the Kingdom of God the family divisions, like all others, will be done away. There will be no marrying or giving in marriage; men will live like the angels in heaven.[1] An ascetic construction has sometimes been placed on this thought of Jesus. It was assumed in the mediæval church that he pointed to celibacy as the ideal condition, and the same view has found expression from time to time in various Christian sects. But his words have to be explained in the light of his whole conception of the Kingdom. He believed that when the will of God was established everywhere there could be no place for anything that made for separation. All souls would depend immediately on God,—all interests would be directed to the one goal of serving Him.

(2) It is further declared that even in the present the family has a secondary value. To do God's will is the supreme end, and in so far as we are distracted from it by domestic ties they must be sacrificed. Jesus himself gave up his home when he undertook

[1] Mt. 22:30; Mk. 12:25; Lk. 20:35.

his mission. When his mother and brethren sought to recall him he looked round on his disciples and said that here was his true family.[2] He refused to accept into his company the man who asked leave to go back first and bury his father.[3] He made it a primary condition of discipleship that father and mother and sisters and brethren must be left behind.[4] This apparent harshness may have been partly due to his feeling that in current Judaism the family had become an end in itself. Men were content to believe that their one duty was to their own little group of kinsfolk, and these groups were ranged in selfish opposition to each other. The aim of Jesus was to make men sensible of their larger brotherhood. Forsaking their immediate kindred they would receive an hundredfold, even in this present time, sisters and brethren, for all the children of God would be equally dear to them. But his chief object was to make it absolutely clear that the duty to God must come first. This is the meaning of his reply to the would-be disciple who sought permission to bury his father before entering on the work of the Kingdom. The attempt has often been made to explain away the literal significance of the words, which might seem at first sight to betray a callousness towards the most natural of human affections. But no far-fetched interpretation is necessary. Jesus acknowledges that no duty can be more sacred than that of a son to a dead father, and therefore declares that even this must give way. It must have happened sometimes during the late war that a soldier was called away from his father's death-bed to discharge his paramount duty to his country. The obligation was a harsh one, but we recognize its necessity. Need we feel repelled because Jesus asserted that the call of

[2] Mk. 3: 33-35; Mt. 12: 46-50; Lk. 8: 20, 21.
[3] Mt. 8: 21, 22; Lk. 9: 59, 60.
[4] Mk. 10: 29; Mt. 19: 29; Lk. 14: 26.

God is more urgent than any other, and must be answered first?

In one sense, therefore, the purpose of Jesus was to make the claim of the family subordinate. He himself foretold that the effect of his message would be to break up the peace of many a household,[5] and to this day, in countries like India and China, where the domestic ties are peculiarly strong, this is the chief stumbling-block to the Christian mission. Jesus clearly perceived that loyalty to the family is wont to conflict with the larger loyalties, and did not hesitate to affirm that in such cases it must yield. Just at this point, however, we can discern one of his great contributions towards the purifying and strengthening of the family relations. While he acknowledged their value for the moral life he would not allow them to narrow and stifle it. He sought to readjust them in such a manner that they should further those higher interests which they too often thrust into the background. By doing so he did not weaken the natural pieties or assign them a lower place than they had previously occupied. He rather exalted them and filled them with a new meaning since they were now made to minister to the great spiritual ends of life.

In a more direct and practical way, by his correction of the law of divorce, Jesus raised the position of the family. That he made such a correction is one of the most certain facts about his teaching; for on this point we have the testimony not only of a number of Synoptic passages, but of one of the few quotations by Paul of a "word of the Lord." The pronouncement on divorce is notable as the one exception to the rule that Jesus did not lay down laws but only guiding principles. That in this instance he offered a new

[5] Mt. 10: 35; Lk. 12: 53.

regulation, canceling that of the Mosaic code, can hardly be denied; but the exception is more apparent than real. He perceived that the relation of man and woman is altogether different from all others. Forms of government, economic systems, social arrangements generally, belong to the mechanism of life, and must be altered from time to time. But the marriage relation is part of the natural order as God Himself designed it; and the sanction involved in it must always remain valid. This idea finds clear expression in the passage (Mt. 19:4-6; Mk. 10:5-9) where Jesus bases his conception of marriage on the Creation story. He asserts, in so many words, that in stating the rule which must hold good for this great human relation he is not imposing an arbitrary enactment but is only restoring a principle which had been wilfully obscured, although it is clearly indicated in the very constitution of man's nature.

Our records vary considerably as to the actual words in which Jesus framed his new law. The confusion is no doubt due to the very fact that the church had here to do with a specific rule which had to be literally obeyed. From the outset this rule was felt to be too rigorous, and efforts were made to qualify it and render it practicable. It is easy to see, in the light of this one instance, what would have happened to the whole body of teaching if it had been cast in the molds of definite law. The attempt to mitigate the rule of divorce is most clearly evident in Matthew, who twice insists on the saving clause "except on the ground of adultery" (Mt. 5:31, 32 *cf.* Mt. 9:9). There is no hint of this concession in the parallel record of Mark. Even in Matthew it is manifestly out of place, for it occurs in a passage of which the whole object is to state moral demands without compromise. Jesus asserts that hatred, impurity, insincerity, are in no circumstances permissible; yet he suddenly goes back on

himself by allowing this exception in the case of divorce.

In Mark (10:11, 12) divorce is forbidden absolutely. "Whosoever shall put away his wife and marry another committeth adultery against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband and be married to another she committeth adultery." It is possible that the second verse has been added later, in view of the Roman custom which granted the right of divorce to the woman as well as the man; and the saying in its most authentic form is probably to be found in Luke (16:18): "Whosoever putteth away his wife and marrieth another committeth adultery; and whosoever marrieth her who is put away from her husband committeth adultery." The same idea that the marriage tie is indissoluble is implied in the passage already noted where Jesus points to the divine ordinance, implied in the Creation story, that husband and wife should belong to one another. Man is not at liberty to separate what God has joined together. That this was the teaching of Jesus is borne out by the "word of the Lord" which Paul quotes in 1 Cor. 7:10, 11: "Let not the wife depart from her husband, but if she depart let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband; and let not the husband put away his wife." It may be that Paul quotes freely, introducing a comment of his own, but he clearly understands Jesus to have made the marriage relation absolutely binding.

One point is open to question,—whether it was divorce that Jesus condemned or remarriage while husband or wife was still living. Taken literally the law as it stands in Matthew and Luke may be held to allow separation on condition that the parties henceforth remain single. This is the point which is emphasized by Paul, and it seems likewise to be implied in Luke's reference to the man who marries the divorced

woman (Lk. 16:18). Jesus may have recognized that occasions arise which make it desirable that husband and wife should cease to live together; but if he made this concession his assertion of the sacredness of the marriage bond is all the more striking. Although the marriage has ceased in everything but name it is still to remain in force. A man and woman once united cannot be really separated. Any subsequent union, though sanctioned by human law, is contrary to the ordinance of God.

This rule on marriage is the one definite enactment of Jesus; and its lasting validity may fairly be questioned. We have perhaps to allow for the fact that he spoke at a time when divorce was scandalously easy, and when the existing law placed tyrannical power in the hands of the man as against the woman. The enactment in its literal form may be subject to modification; but the conception which underlies it must always be fundamental to the right organization of the social life. Jesus perceived that all other human relations must depend on the sanctity attached to marriage. He insisted, therefore, that marriage must be regarded not as a temporary and casual contract but as a covenant which must not be broken. He sought to lift it out of the domain of law and establish it as part of the divine order, which man must not pervert at his own caprice to his own ends.

CHAPTER XV

PERSONAL VIRTUES

JESUS is occupied for the most part with the varied relations in which men stand to one another; but in a number of sayings he deals more directly with the individual life. It must be noted, however, that the idea of self-regarding virtues is foreign to him. He requires that men should aim at certain excellences, not because they owe a duty to themselves as men, but as a necessary part of their service to God. His attitude in this respect may be contrasted with that of the Greek moralists, who set out from the conception of man as the artist of his own life. The diverse elements of our nature are so much rough material which may be fashioned into something beautiful, and to create this harmony is our moral task. Each virtue must have reference to the character as a whole, and becomes a defect if it is magnified out of due proportion. For Jesus, the task imposed on man is to conform his will to the will of God. The harmony of the character with itself is no criterion, for man exists for the service of God, and his virtues are those which fit him for that service. These must be cherished to the exclusion of all else.

Now it cannot be denied that the effect of this religious emphasis is in some ways to narrow the moral ideal. The aim, apparently, is not so much to produce a full-rounded human being as a *religious* man, and at some periods, most notably in the Middle Ages, this preoccupation with one aspect of man's nature has

proved harmful. It may be granted that religion is the sovereign interest in life, and that it ought to rule and leaven every other, but for the making of a complete man the religious virtues are not sufficient. When they are so cultivated as to absorb all others the result is too often a type of character which is unnatural and ineffective, and even repellent. The mediæval saints who most attract us are those whose piety was touched with human passions, and even with human failings. It is not merely that they are thus drawn within our range of sympathy, but we feel that they were actually larger men, richer and more potent characters, because the religious interest did not engross them wholly. Much of the prejudice which Christianity has excited from the first has been due to the feeling that it exaggerates the worth of some qualities at the expense of others, which also belong to our nature and ought therefore to have their place. We shall consider later whether this was the intention of Jesus; but meanwhile it may be admitted that he starts from the religious estimate of man's life, and that he appraises all virtues in the light of it.

It is for this reason that he attributes a primary value to *humility*. He often speaks of humility as the distinctive mark of his followers, and the stress he lays on it has tended to warp our conception of his whole teaching. That he so exalts a quality which in some of its manifestations is by no means admirable may partly be accounted for by historical conditions. The cult of the Law, against which he was obliged to make his protest, was apt to result in a self-righteous temper, which vitiated even the most praiseworthy actions. The Pharisee, confident that he had perfectly obeyed the Law, took credit for himself before God, and at the same time despised his neighbor, who had not the same claim on the divine approval. In his revulsion

from this unlovely type of piety Jesus was led, perhaps, to place an excessive value on humility. It should be noted, too, that his regard for it was only the other side of a lofty self-respect. With the sensitiveness of a fine spirit he shrank from all forwardness and personal advertisement, and saw that they often defeated themselves. He pictures the shame of the man who has taken a place beyond his merit, and is compelled to step down when a worthier than he appears. Is it not more honorable, he asks, to humble yourself that you may be exalted?[1] But the emphasis on humility is more than an accidental note in his teaching. It came from his deep conviction that our life is lived in the presence of God, who sets before us an infinite ideal. When the feeling takes possession of a man that he has already attained to this ideal, his moral sense is paralyzed. All the motives that should quicken it lose their power, and he is morally dead. This is the thought that underlies the oft-repeated call to humility, and most of the criticisms that have been urged against it are quite beside the mark. The humility which Jesus demands is humility towards God. He indeed points out that the man who is humble towards God will also cease to be arrogant among his fellow-men. He will be mindful always of his own shortcomings, and will be content with the lower place, aware that any superiority he may claim is so slight as not to be worth asserting. But the humility which Jesus desires is in its essence a religious attitude. Men are to feel that God is over them, and that they are measured continually by a standard to which they can never attain. They are to realize that when they have done their utmost they are still unprofitable servants.[2] In this knowledge that their task is an endless one they are to be conscious always that

[1] Lk. 14: 8-11.
[2] Lk. 17: 10.

they have achieved nothing, and that the real fulfilment is still in front of them.

(2) Along with humility the disciples are to practice a complete *sincerity*. Always speaking the thing they mean they must abandon all useless oaths, and confine themselves to a simple "yea" and "nay."[3] This sincerity is to pervade not merely their words and actions but their whole inward life. The "hypocrisy" which Jesus so often rebukes is something more than an inconsistency of the act with the thought or intention. The worst hypocrisy, and that which he chiefly has in mind when he warns against the vice, is that of self-deception. "If the light that is in you be darkness, how great is the darkness?"[4] His quarrel with the Pharisees was not that they were bad men posing as models of righteousness. For the most part they believed that they were good men, and their sin consisted in nothing else than this ignorance of their true condition. Sincerity, as Jesus conceives it, implies that all thoughts and motives can fully bear the light. This is the meaning of the Beatitude "Blessed are the pure in heart," with its reminiscence of the Psalm which declares that only the upright man may appear before God in His temple.[5] The idea of the Psalm, however, is carried to a deeper issue. Sincerity is the necessary condition, not only of true worship, but of inward fellowship with God.

(3) In many sayings, and in several of the most impressive parables, Jesus insists on the need of *fidelity*. Men are to think of themselves as stewards appointed by God, to whom they owe an unlimited service. In small things as in great they must be faithful, conscious at all times that the highest issues may depend on their loyalty. But Jesus is concerned not so much

[3] Mt. 5:37.
[4] Mt. 6:23; Lk. 11:35.
[5] Ps. 24:4.

with the actual value of the work as with the strength and blessing which come from the discharge of duty. The man who acts faithfully has won for himself the approval of God.[6] He has fitted himself for larger responsibilities.[7] He has given proof of the moral worth that is in him, and has confirmed and increased it.[8] It follows that the common duties of life, as Jesus regards them, have all a religious significance. By their fidelity in the small things God is testing men continually to discover whether they are worthy to be received into His Kingdom.[9]

(4) It is often objected that in his emphasis on humility and kindness Jesus left out of account the virtue of *courage,* which the pagan moralists rightly perceived to be fundamental. This, however, is a strange misunderstanding of the whole drift of his teaching; for in the Gospels, no less than in pagan ethics, a primary place is given to courage. The disciples are urged continually to throw off all fear of man, of the troubles and difficulties that confront them, of the perils that may await them in the future. Jesus' own life was the supreme example of courage, and he asked of his people that they too should take up the cross and follow him. It would hardly be too much to say that the very watchword of his gospel is "fear not." [10] For the most part, however, he associates courage not with conquest and mastery, which are contrary to his great demand for brotherly love, but with patient endurance. He has often been accused for this reason of breaking down the virile spirit of antiquity, and exalting mere submissiveness into a virtue. But when he calls on men to endure, his one

[6] Lk. 12: 42; Mk. 13: 34 *f.;* Mt. 24: 45 *f.*
[7] Mt. 25: 21.
[8] Lk. 16: 10.
[9] Lk. 16: 11, 12.
[10] *Cf.* Mt. 10: 26, 31; Lk. 5: 10, 8: 50, 12: 7, 32.

thought is that they must refuse to submit to anything but the clear will of God. In face of all pressure of circumstance and of trials however great, they must hold their own manfully until at last they overcome. As a matter of historical fact Christianity has been, in a pre-eminent degree, the religion of the fighting races; and this has often been urged against it as a reproach. More than ever in these late years we have been assured on many sides that the Christian teaching has manifestly failed. The very nations which had been nurtured for centuries on the gospel of peace threw themselves on each other in the most desperate of all wars. Now there can certainly be no question that war in itself is the negation of the Christian idea of brotherhood, but in the stubbornness with which war is waged, when it once breaks out among Christian nations, there is no inconsistency. For Christianity is essentially a religion of courage. It has always taught that men must be faithful unto death in what they conceive to be their duty, and that compromise and submission are unworthy of the disciple of Christ. This temper of unyielding valor is part of our Christian inheritance, no less than the spirit of brotherly kindness; and this must never be forgotten in any project for putting an end to war. Appeals to self-interest or timidity or indolence will always fail; and although they are often made in the name of the gospel they are contrary to all its teachings. The effort to bring peace must begin with the establishment of a just order, which Christian men can honestly accept, or their religion, instead of preventing war, will only make it the more inexorable.

Jesus, then, as much as the pagan teachers, insists on courage as the primary virtue. The great difference between them is not in their estimate of courage, or even in the kind of courage they value, but in the

motive to which they trace it. For Jesus courage is not a matter of physical constitution or for that part a purely moral quality, but the expression of faith in God. Men are to realize that so long as they do God's will he works along with them, and that therefore they are strong. In the confidence that God is supporting them they can meet all circumstances fearlessly, knowing that they will overcome the world. Courage is thus a vital element not merely in the ethic of Jesus but in his religion.

As there are certain virtues to which Jesus assigns a cardinal importance, so there are vices which in a special degree excite his scorn and anger. His condemnations are the more noteworthy because he utters them so sparingly. We have here one of the most striking differences between his teaching and that of the prophets, whose passion for righteousness is wont to express itself in bitter invective against various forms of evil. Jesus holds up a positive standard of good, and his rare outbursts of indignation have nothing in common with those of the professional moralist. They arise spontaneously out of a strong feeling, and afford us a real insight into his judgments of right and wrong.

The denunciations have no doubt to be considered in the light of the time and circumstances which called them forth. Every age has its characteristic evils against which the preacher of righteousness must direct his protest; and when Jesus condemns some sins more than others this may mean nothing more than that he found them especially prevalent in his day. Yet when all allowance is made for this temporary element his condemnations are significant, and are fully in keeping with his primary teaching. He denounced certain sins, not merely because he was brought into frequent contact with them, but because

he recognized them as the typical and most dangerous sins.

It is remarkable that about the grosser sensual vices he says little. These are the most obvious offenses against the moral law, and in all ages have incurred the sternest rebukes of the ethical teacher. When we turn from the Gospels to the Epistles of Paul we find constant warnings against sensuality, and they are still more abundant in the later Christian writings. Jesus indeed takes for granted the need for personal purity. He condemns not only the adulterous act but the lustful thought and look.[11] Yet he never dwells at length on the grosser vices, and seldom touches on them except incidentally. It might even appear as if he regarded them with a certain tolerance. He declared that publicans and harlots would enter the Kingdom of God before the scribes and Pharisees.[12] He extended forgiveness to the woman who was a sinner and the woman taken in adultery.[13] Nothing in his behavior aroused such suspicion against him as his intercourse with those whom society had made outcast because of their gross living. "Behold a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber, the friend of publicans and sinners." [14] His attitude may have been due, in some measure, to his revolt against the current Jewish morality, which laid all stress on avoidance of the grosser sins. At a later time, when Christian missionaries were thrown into the midst of the corrupt heathen society, they were compelled to protest strongly, and often exclusively, against sins of the body; but Jesus could feel that this was not necessary. The standard of morality, in the narrower sense, was established, and the real danger was that men should

[11] Mt. 5: 27 *f.*
[12] Mt. 21: 31.
[13] Lk. 7: 37 *f.*; Jn. 8: 11.
[14] Mt. 11, 19; Lk. 7: 34.

mistake it for the whole commandment of God. But his comparative silence on the grosser vices is chiefly to be explained from the positiveness which is the unfailing note in his teaching. He was conscious that all effort to suppress the sensual appetites by rebuke and prohibition was ineffectual. They could be expelled only by putting higher impulses in their place. "From within, out of the heart of man, proceed fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, covetings, lasciviousness"; [15] and the work of purification must commence from within. The will has to be turned in a new direction and charged with a higher purpose, so that the baser desires will die down of their own accord. It was this inward transformation to which he set himself when, instead of rebuking the publicans and sinners, he gave them a place in his company.

The sins which he denounces are not those of appetite but those which involve an inward falsehood, a deliberate perversion of will. A sensual man knows that he acts basely; he is carried away by impulses which overcome his better nature, and it may still be awakened and given strength to resist. But he who allows his moral instincts to be perverted, so that he calls good evil and evil good, is beyond hope. This is the idea which underlies the much debated saying on the unpardonable sin. "He that slanders the Holy Spirit hath never forgiveness." [16] However the saying must be interpreted in detail the central meaning is sufficiently clear. Jesus is answering his enemies who had accused him of doing his works of healing by collusion with the devil. They could not deny that the works were beneficent and advanced the cause of God, yet they set them down to a Satanic power. What hope could there be for such men? They had lost the faculty of moral vision. Those very instincts

[15] Mk. 7: 21; Mt. 15: 19.
[16] Mk. 3: 29; Mt. 12: 31; Lk. 12: 10.

which might have touched their lives to higher issues had become distorted, and could only lead them the farther astray.

In this conviction that the real sins are those of the will, Jesus denounces pride and arrogance. Just as humility is the necessary condition of all true service of God, so pride makes us incapable of this service. The proud man has lost all sense of the relation in which he stands to God, and cannot draw near to God, even when he would. Not only so, but he has lost all measure of himself. He believes that he has reached fulfilment, and in his self-complacency has no desire or will to rise to better things. And as he is blind to his own condition, so he is cut off from others. Sufficient to himself he can feel no sympathy with his fellow-men, and cannot help or serve them. So for Jesus pride, in one form or another, is the cardinal sin. In itself it may appear harmless, and may directly work no evil, and yet it is the great hindrance to everything that pertains to the higher life. It lies at the root of every other sin because it consists in a perversion of the will. The proud man has put himself in the place of God, and all his thoughts and acts proceed from a wrong center, and cannot but make for evil. It is by no accident, therefore, that Jesus so often couples pride with hypocrisy. By this word, as we have seen, he denotes not merely intentional but unconscious falsehood. The hypocrite is false without knowing it, and it is this which makes his condition so hopeless. Again and again Jesus uses the word "hypocrite" to denote his utmost scorn and abhorrence. To take the false for the true, to have the light that is in you darkness, is moral perdition. The issues of life have been tainted at the fountain-head.

One vice which Jesus repeatedly denounces is that of cruelty. Believing as he does that love is the supreme duty he revolts with his whole soul against

all forms of oppression,—against the exploitation of the weak by the strong. He condemns not merely open cruelty but even more the cruelty which acts indirectly. "It must needs be that offenses come, but woe unto that man through whom the offense cometh. It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck and he were drowned in the depths of the sea, than that he should make one of these little ones to offend." [17] The weak may stumble apparently by his own fault, since he is incapable of resisting the "offenses" that lie across his path. But the strong man who has caused these offenses, or who sees them and does not trouble to remove them, must bear the real blame. Here, as everywhere, Jesus is concerned not so much with acts as with motives. The sin of cruelty does not consist in the actual infliction of pain, but in the self-centered disposition which cares nothing for the rights of others. For his own ends a man takes advantage of the weak. He sees the need that ought to appeal to his strength and pity and passes it by, or makes it the occasion of a personal gain. The spirit of oppression, in whatever shape it disguises itself, is the very denial of that will of God in which Jesus finds the true meaning and end of life.

The denunciations are mostly directed against the scribes and Pharisees,—the religious leaders who had set themselves in opposition to the message of the Kingdom. By their antagonism they compelled Jesus to assail the type of piety for which they stood, and it may be that his strictures were not wholly just. He represents them as morally worthless men, while it is certain that many if not most of them were honestly striving, according to their lights, to follow the higher life. Just as the Reformation won its noblest converts among the priests and monks, so it was men like Paul, trained in the Pharisaic discipline, who were to offer

[17] Mt. 18: 7; Lk. 17: 1.

the warmest response to the message of Jesus. There is reason for the protest, often made in recent years by both Jewish and Christian scholars, that he did the Pharisees an injustice when he held them up as the typical examples of pride, hypocrisy, oppression.

Yet his judgment of them cannot be wholly set down to prejudice or the heat of controversy, for they were the standing illustration of what seemed, to his mind, the radical sin. Others might be far worse offenders, but there was always the possibility that they sinned through ignorance, or force of circumstances or violent passions. No excuse of this kind could avail for the Pharisees. They knew the Law, and were sheltered from dangerous temptations, and were sufficiently masters of themselves to maintain a fair show of righteousness. None the less they were arrogant and self-seeking. With all their zeal for the Law they were blind to its essential demands. They had resisted the manifest call of God, and would neither seek the Kingdom themselves nor suffer those who would to enter it.[18] Their will had become perverted; and for such men the "change of mind" with which the new life must begin was not possible. Their sin was that against the Holy Spirit, for which there could be no forgiveness.

[18] Mt. 23: 13.

CHAPTER XVI

THE NEW TYPE OF CHARACTER

IT has been customary from the earliest days tc single out the moral qualities which from time to time are commended in the Gospels and to regard them, in their sum, as making up the Christian character. But these inventories of the whole duty of man which have been compiled from his teaching convey a wrong impression of the purpose of Jesus. It was only by accident that he was led to lay stress on particular virtues, and by another accident that his sayings on them have been preserved. His real object was to create in men a new and better will. "First make the tree good." [1] The one thing necessary is to renew and purify the inward nature, and all right acts will then grow out of it, like fruits out of the tree.

Jesus, therefore, is not primarily concerned with the separate virtues which mark the good life. To be sure he has much to say about kindness, humility, patience, forgiveness; but he thinks of these and all other excellences as bound up together and springing from the same root. His disciples are to be known not from their possession of this attribute or that, but from their character as a whole. They look on the world with a new mind. They encounter the problems of life in a moral temper which is different from that of other men. It was this type of character which Jesus tried to form in his disciples, and of which he was himself the great example. His originality consists not in

[1] Mt. 12: 33; Lk. 6: 43.

the particular things he taught, or in the love, faith, goodness, courage, which he displayed; for parallels to all of these may be found elsewhere, and when we consider these alone it is not difficult to show that he was only one in the long succession of wise and good men. The originality which has made him the supreme force in history is to be sought in his whole character; and when we begin to analyze it into its component parts the vital thing eludes us. Sharing in man's ordinary life he lived it from a new center, and in doing so made a fresh beginning in the career of humanity. Paul sought to express this truth when he described Jesus as the second Adam.[2] He felt that in Jesus a new type of man had appeared in the world, and that men were to be molded henceforth after this image. Jesus himself appears in some degree to have realized that this was the significance of his work. He chose his disciples, Mark tells us, "that they might be with him," [3]—not merely to listen to his teaching but to submit themselves to the personal influence which would change them into new men.

What was this type of character which Jesus exemplified, and which he sought to create in his followers? He himself described it as the character of the Kingdom. His people were to set their hearts on the age that was coming, and to live even now as if they belonged to it. Over against the men of this world they were to approve themselves, in all their thought and behavior, as citizens of the Kingdom. The summary of the new teaching in the Sermon on the Mount is prefaced by the Beatitudes, in which Jesus lays down no rules or principles, but tries simply to portray the kind of man who will find entrance into the Kingdom. Just as this age produces the character which is fitted to thrive in it,—the self-centered, aggressive, worldly-

[2] I Cor. 15: 22, 45.
[3] Mk. 3: 14.

minded man,—so the coming age will require men of a temper altogether different. Such men alone will find themselves at home in the new conditions. All values will be completely changed, so that qualities which have hitherto been cherished will become useless. The first will be last and the last first. Jesus bids his disciples live as if the new age had already come, and to this end they have not merely to reform their lives at one point or the other, but to turn and become as little children. All the particular virtues they are to practise will be only the outcome of this change which has taken place in the inner self.

It does not follow that he aimed at molding all men after one uniform pattern. The idea has too often prevailed in the church, and has worked infinite mischief, that since the Christian is a new man he must divest himself of everything that belonged to his old nature. Jesus never failed to recognize that men are all made differently, and cannot be forced to adapt themselves to one given standard. In parables like the Sower and the Talents he is at pains to show that those who respond to the message will do so according to their several dispositions. Nothing, indeed, is more remarkable in all the parables than his keen delight in the diversity of human types, and it can never have been his purpose to obliterate it. He took pleasure, as we can plainly see, in the variety of character among his own disciples, and noted it by appropriate names. His whole gospel, for that part, rests on the belief that men have value in the sight of God as individuals. As the shepherd can distinguish between the units of his flock, so God knows His people severally, and is grieved if He should lose one. Jesus is possessed always with this sense of the worth of personality, and the thought of refashioning all men after a single pattern never entered into his mind. His aim is rather to liberate them from all that warps their

development as individuals. While he lives for the present age a man is enslaved by its conventions and prejudices, and is in no way different from the millions of other men. But when he seeks the Kingdom, making it his one desire to do the will of God, he is set free. He can start afresh, as if from childhood, and can unfold the true possibilities of his nature.

Jesus set himself, therefore, to produce that type of character which would answer to the conditions of the Kingdom. He said much of the virtues it would exhibit, but his thought was always of the will that prompted them,—the tree of which they were the fruit. When we thus understand him we can do justice to one aspect of his teaching which has often been overlooked, although it is perhaps more significant than any other. Ever and again he insists that the true goodness must be unconscious. Unlike the Pharisees, who kept a definite standard before them and knew when they had satisfied it, the disciples were to do good without calculation. Their right hand was not to know what the left was doing. When they appeared at last in the Judgment, and received the divine approval, it was to come to them as a surprise. When had they rendered this high service? What had they done out of the common that they should be chosen to inherit the Kingdom? [4] We have here one of the outstanding differences of the ethic of Jesus not only from that of antiquity, but from that which has usually passed as Christian. The Christian moralists, almost from the outset, have laid stress on the duty of self-examination. They have thought of the true disciple as engaged day by day in shaping for himself a character which will approximate ever more nearly to his ideal. But Jesus himself never speaks of this "character-building." He makes no demand for intro-

[4] Mt. 25: 31 *ff.*

spection, and attaches little value to the goodness which is the product of a set design. What he requires is not a process of building but of growth. Men are so to identify themselves with the Kingdom that the higher will becomes their own, and all their moral action will then be spontaneous. No deliberate self-discipline will be necessary, for the new nature will express itself in the lives without their knowing. The Christian character at its finest has always answered to this requirement of Jesus, and this has been the secret of its charm. We can feel that its virtues are not the result of painful labor, but are the outflow of an inner spring. They are the very nature of the man, and he exercises them unconsciously, and without effort or reserve.

A morality of this kind, which bids men strive after righteousness and yet declares that righteousness must come of its own accord, appears at first sight to contradict itself. It is not surprising that the church has sometimes fallen back on theories of predestination. If the true goodness can only be attained apart from one's own effort, must we not conclude that God Himself has chosen whom He would, and endowed them with the needful grace? Yet it is certain that this fatalism was not in the mind of Jesus. He always speaks of the right to enter the Kingdom as one that every man must win for himself by struggle and sacrifice. It is the pearl of great price which cannot be secured unless all else is given in return for it; and Jesus laments that so few are equal to the great renunciation. He knew of no grace of election,—no saving virtue which is bestowed for nothing on "the soul naturally Christian." None the less, he thought of goodness as free and unconscious. Just as he reduced all the thousand commandments to the one great commandment, so he called for one moral effort which would make all others superfluous. His disciples

were to break with this world and yield themselves wholly to the will of God. They were to seek the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, fixing their eyes steadily on the ultimate goal, so that the path which led to it would shape itself as they went on. Here, as everywhere else, the ethic of Jesus merges in his religion, and cannot otherwise be understood. His purpose, as Paul discerned, was not to enforce a rule that must be followed with labor and difficulty, but to impart a Spirit which would take the place of law.

CHAPTER XVII

PERMANENT VALIDITY

THERE is hardly an element in the message of Jesus which has not at one time or another been called in question. Many of the criticisms have been far-fetched and artificial, and are obviously inspired by religious prejudice. Others have rested on misunderstanding, or on the social or philosophical doctrines of the hour. It was argued, for instance, in ancient times that the Christian ethic was fitted only for weaklings and slaves, while in our day it is often condemned as a bourgeois morality, which leaves the toiling masses out of account. Objections of this kind do not call for any serious answer; but there are others which seem to strike more deeply at the claims of the Gospel teaching.

(1) We are told, for one thing, that whatever its former value it now belongs to the past. Precepts laid down in Palestine two thousand years ago can have little relevance to our modern world. The attempt to enforce them can only be futile when it is not positively mischievous. This criticism would certainly have weight if the object of Jesus had been to enforce a definite code, similar to that of Moses and other great law-givers. Nothing has so hindered the progress of the race as the crystallizing of ordinances which in their own time were salutary. The history of the church itself affords melancholy examples of the preservation of ancient customs until they have become mere fetters. But the ethic of Jesus, as our examina-

tion has shown, does not take the form of statutory law. It is concerned throughout with the inner principles of human action, which do not change. The great requirements of justice, mercy, faithfulness, may have a wider meaning for one age than for another; but to assume that they become different is simply to deny the existence of the moral law. It was those essential principles which Jesus asserted, and if he understood them truly his message must be always valid.

(2) A much graver difficulty arises from the intimate connection of the ethical teaching with certain religious beliefs. Some modern writers have maintained that if the ethic is to be placed on a firm basis it must be cut loose from these entanglements. They hold that when it is so separated it will commend itself to people of all religions and of no religion at all. The very existence of God may be denied, and the Christian ethic will stand foursquare on the ground of its own intrinsic truth. But whether we like it or not the moral teaching of Jesus is rooted in his religion, and cannot be detached from it. Even his demand for social justice and human brotherhood is based on a religious postulate, and is left hanging in the air when this is withdrawn. There is no way of saving Jesus' ethic at the expense of his religion; but it can never be sufficiently emphasized that he builds always on the central things in religion. On a superficial view he makes much of the current Jewish beliefs, and if his message was vitally bound up with them we should have to acknowledge that it has now, to a great extent lost its value. But we can perceive in every instance that he employs the traditional form for the sake of the deeper truth involved in it. His mind is occupied with the thought of God as righteous, merciful, overruling all things for good. From this faith in the sovereign God who is at the same time Father of mankind

the morality of Jesus cannot, at any point, be separated.

(3) But the objection that the Gospel ethic is conditioned by certain beliefs has been urged from a different side. Granting that morality must rest on religion, and that the religion of Jesus is likely to be permanent, must we not admit that religion, though it is the highest interest, is not the only interest in life? Jesus appears to think of the attainment of the Kingdom as man's one task, and allows no place to any activity by which it is not in some way furthered. Against this conception of life the modern mind, especially within the last century, has revolted. It insists on the right of many things which cannot, except in a quite artificial manner, be connected with religion. The study of nature and history, the cultivation of the sense of beauty, the amenities of common life, the details of one's daily business,—these are all legitimate and necessary, but to link them up with religion is only to spoil them for their own purposes. The subjection of all human interests to religion was seriously attempted in the mediæval church, and later in the Puritan movement; and gave rise, in many instances, to a very noble type of living. But it was narrow, and in some respects false and unlovely, and the reaction from it led too often to complete irreligion. There is a widespread feeling in our own day, due to the memory of those past experiments, that the Christian ethic is defective. Life, we are told, is wider than religion, and needs a morality that will cover it in its whole extent. Now there is certainly fair ground for such criticism. Believing as he did that the supreme crisis was just at hand, Jesus could not but lay the whole emphasis on the religious issue. He was intent on making men realize that nothing mattered except their fitness for the Kingdom of God; and his teaching is so far one-sided, and tends to

produce a type of character which is not entirely healthy. At the same time it is well to remember that what he always demands is a spontaneous, self-forgetful goodness. He does not ask that men should consciously put the religious motive into all their behavior. If they have identified themselves with the will of God this motive will be continually present and active, but without their knowing it. They will go about their lives simply and naturally, allowing free play to every energy of body and mind, and yet in the most real sense they will live for God. What offends us in a certain type of Christian is not religion but a self-conscious pietism; and it was this very thing which offended Jesus also.

It is sometimes objected, however, that even from the religious point of view his teaching is one-sided. There are many activities which have decidedly a religious aspect and on which he says nothing, or else expresses himself so vaguely that he affords us no real guidance. Perhaps the supreme ethical questions of our time are those which concern war, industrial relations, the duty of citizens to the state, and of states to one another. Jesus never deals explicitly with these questions, although all of them manifestly need to be answered in the light of religion. Neither does he touch on the many difficult problems which are incident to the pursuit of culture. From the time of Plato onward it has been evident to all thinking men that morality has a vital interest in methods of education, in the aims of literature, in the various arts which have a subtle and pervading influence on the common life. With the advance of civilization these matters become always more important, but Jesus leaves them alone. He appears to address himself to a peasant community in a simple age, and our modern perplexities lie beyond his horizon. It is argued, not unnaturally, that an ethic of this kind can have only a limited

application. We may accept the guidance of Jesus in the more elementary business of life, but for clear direction in the larger and more intricate duties we must look elsewhere.

Two considerations, however, both of them vital to any true estimate of his teaching, are here left out of sight. (1) On the one hand, he never professed to offer definite solutions for all the problems of his own age, much less for those which would emerge in the future. He was content, as we have seen, to set forth the great principles which must determine moral action, and which must hold good in all times and circumstances. Our modern life, it may be granted, is infinitely more varied than that which he knew in Galilee, and has given rise to needs and interests which he never contemplated. But just as the fundamental laws of architecture must be always the same, whatever the size and style of the building, so in morality. The world of to-day, with its many-sided culture and its network of civic and industrial relations, does not require a new ethic. If the principles of Jesus were true on the narrow scale they are true also on the larger one. We have only to study how we may still observe them, although we build with new material and according to a vaster and more diversified plan. (2) On the other hand, it was part of his intention that men should ponder for themselves how his rule of life should be carried into practice. We can see now, as we look back over the centuries, that the endeavor to think out his principles, in their bearing on ever-changing conditions, has been the chief factor in Christian progress. Paul set himself to consider how they could meet the new problems which faced the church in the great heathen cities, and was led thereby to a deeper comprehension of their nature. The Reformers tried to make them valid for the modern world that had emerged from the Middle Ages, and in the effort

to do so perceived their larger import and turned the life of the nations in a new direction. In our own day the task is laid on us of bringing the whole social and political order into better harmony with the demands of Jesus, and how this will be effected we cannot yet tell. But it is evident already that the Christian conscience has been sharpened. Men have been compelled everywhere to examine the ideas of the gospel more seriously, and to discover what is really involved in them. Not a few of their practical implications are now coming to light for the first time. Now all this is what Jesus himself intended. He knew that if he offered a set rule, as the Law had attempted to do, for every difficulty that might present itself, he would not help men in their task as moral beings, but would only weaken and hinder them. He wished to develop their own powers of insight and initiative. Here were the great principles of action; how could they be made effectual? The duty of the disciple was to think them over for himself and learn what they required of him, and so apply them in ever new directions to the manifold problems of life.

In what sense, then, may it be affirmed that the ethic of Jesus has a permanent validity? Its claim was formerly rested on theological doctrine. Jesus, it was maintained, was so related to God that he spoke with a divine authority, and his precepts were all of the nature of oracles in which the truth was delivered once for all. This mode of thought no longer appeals to us. We recognize that the creeds in which the doctrine of Christ's Person were formulated were of later growth, and must themselves be judged in the light of facts which they were once supposed to verify. The teaching of Jesus must stand in the last resort by its own worth, and not by the support of any arbitrary doctrine. Are we justified in concluding, from our

study of its nature and purpose, that it must remain valid for all time?

(1) Its right may be grounded, first of all, on its inner fruitfulness. The precepts of Jesus can be written down on a few pages, and they were addressed to men who lived long ago, under conditions very different from our own. It may fairly be contended that he did not represent the larger outlook even of that age. He knew nothing of the complex life of cities like Rome and Alexandria; he was unacquainted with the profound ethical thinking of Plato and Aristotle and the Stoics. His thought was circumscribed by Jewish beliefs which we can now see to have been in great measure fantastic, and was influenced at almost every point by the peculiar situation in Palestine. Yet the principles which he laid down have proved themselves, during the two thousand years which have since elapsed, to be capable of ever new application. The social order has been transformed many times over, but in each succeeding age men have gone back to those sayings of Jesus, and have found them charged with a living significance. Problems have arisen which in his lifetime it was impossible to foresee, but through obedience to his directions they have been solved. The range of man's knowledge has been immensely widened, the laws that govern his body, his mental processes, the material forces with which he must coöperate, have been far more fully ascertained; but all new discovery has only served to vindicate the wisdom of his rule of life. Like no other it has shown the capacity for unfolding itself. From its own inward resources it has been able to meet all the new requirements which have been laid on it by the world's progress. There is no reason to doubt that this vitality of the gospel will continue to be inexhaustible.

(2) Again,—and this is the reason why his teaching has proved so vital,—Jesus concerned himself with the

underlying, permanent needs of human life. It was in one way an advantage that his lot was cast in a simple society, ignorant of the many complications in which life has since been involved. He spoke to men who worked with their own hands for to-morrow's bread, who were in constant intercourse with neighbors whom they could directly help or injure, who spent their days in the open fields and were limited to the common round of human experience. His attention was thus concentrated on the unchanging elements out of which our life is woven, and which are often disguised from us amidst the intricacies and refinements of our modern world. But it was no historical accident that determined the lines of his teaching. That apparent narrowness of interest which has often been urged against him as his defect, was really his greatness. With a sure instinct he pierced through all that belongs to the circumference of life and went straight to the center. The things that occupied him were those which touch our humanity in its very substance and in its great abiding relations. His message, for this reason, has made the same appeal at all times and to all varieties of men. Other ethical systems pass out of date with every shift in the intellectual outlook or the social order. No revolution can ever affect the value of the ethic of Jesus. Before it can become obsolete man himself will have to grow different in the constitution of his being.

(3) As he dealt with the essential things in life, so the demands he made were self-evidently the highest. A time cannot be conceived when men shall progress beyond them, or in any true sense attain to them. He called for absolute sincerity in word and deed, for a love that toils and endures without limit, for a goodness which is perfect like that of God. The moral goal to which Jesus points us is an infinite one, and must therefore always remain the goal towards which men

are striving. His ethic can lose its authority only on the one condition that love, truth, goodness, should some day cease to be regarded as the highest ideals. Some modern thinkers, in their effort to prove that the Christian morality is only for a time, have boldly declared that this change is coming. They have held that Jesus was mistaken in his estimate of moral values, and that the pagan worship of force and egoism had a sounder foundation. It can only be answered that the deepest instincts of our nature, ever since Jesus appeared, have responded to his conception of what is highest. We cannot but believe that somehow it is bound up with the ultimate order of the world,—that it answers, as Jesus himself affirmed, to the will of God.

(4) Not only did he set before us the true moral ideal, but he made it one which in some measure can be realized. The weakness of ethical systems has always been that they offered counsels of perfection but supplied no means whereby they could be carried into practice. Paul perceived that this had been the failure of the Law, which itself was holy and just and good, but was weak through the flesh.[1] To a far greater extent this criticism might seem to apply to the Christian ethic, with its insistence on an ideal which confessedly is unattainable. Yet in all ages the gospel has provided the dynamic which has enabled men to follow out, however imperfectly, the rule which it enjoins. This energy has its spring in the religion that lies behind the teaching,—a religion which must never be confounded with the forms and dogmas whereby it may express itself from time to time. It consists in the last resort in that living faith in God, which was the secret of Jesus' own life, and which he communicated to men.

(5) Above all, his aim was to create in his followers

[1] Rom. 8: 3.

a new will; and it is this which affords us the certainty that his ethic will never be superseded. He worked for his own age, and was silent on many questions which have since called for an answer. His treatment even of those issues which directly challenged him was far from complete, and it is easy to contend that he does not now provide us with adequate guidance. But he never meant that his new righteousness should be summed up in those formal precepts which have accidentally come down to us. His purpose was to impart to men a new moral ardor, a capacity for knowing and choosing the right, a will in harmony with the divine will. In one sense the world may yet advance beyond the teaching of the Gospels. A time may come, though it still seems to be ages distant, when the rule of Jesus will so possess the mind of the race that it will be obeyed naturally and unfailingly, and will be needed no longer. But this will only be the consummation which Jesus himself desired and worked for. Men will truly become his disciples when they have attained to that new will, which is its own law.

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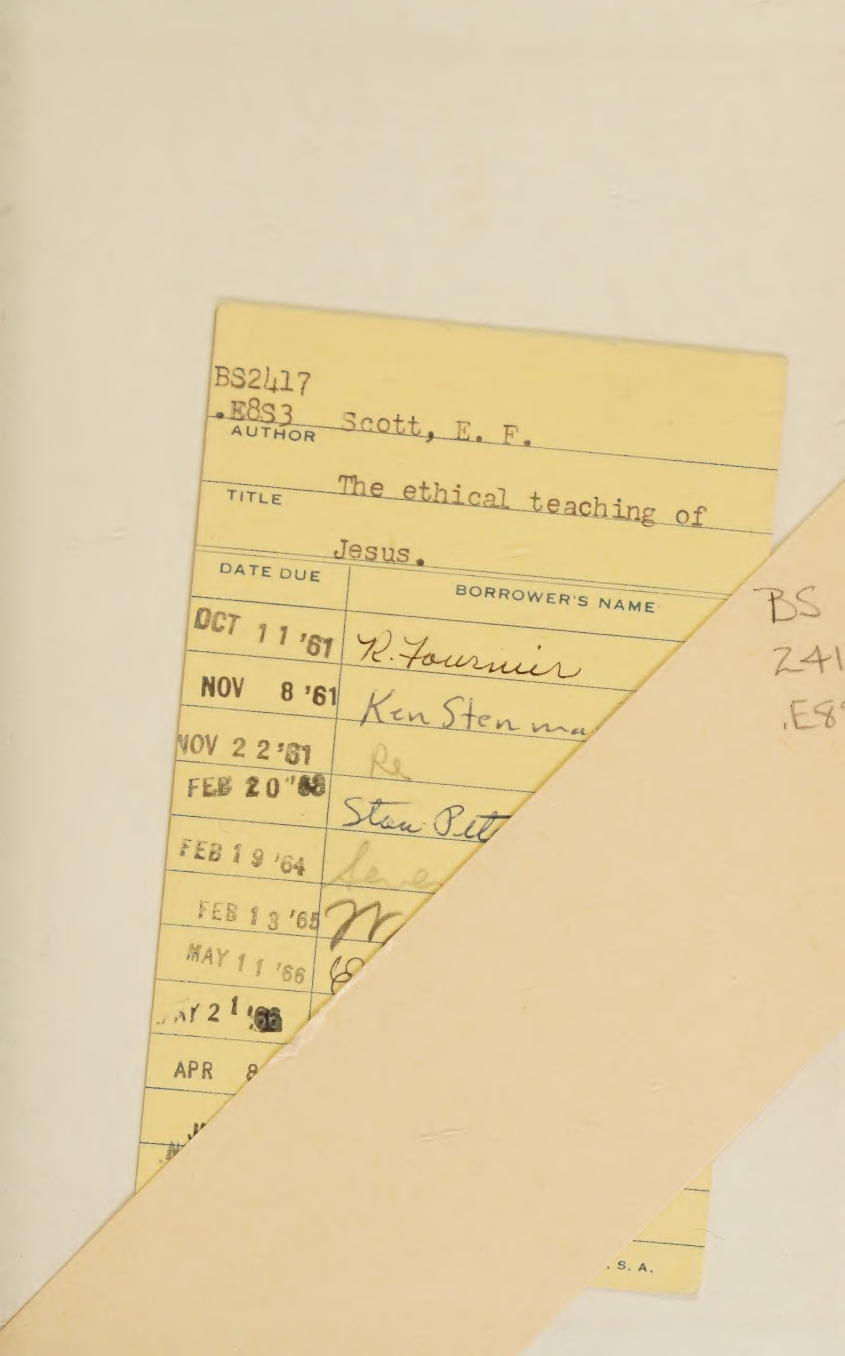
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S. A.